

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

# Sight & Sound



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CHLOE SEVIGNY AND ADAPTING JANE AUSTEN IN

## LOVE & FRIENDSHIP

PLUS

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- 'KNIGHT OF CUPS' AND LATE TERRENCE MALICK ● LUCILE HADZIALILOVIC'S 'EVOLUTION'

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AND CINEMAS NATIONWIDE

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 OFFICIAL SELECTION  
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# new films



**room**  
also available on blu-ray  
released 09/05/2016

**film of the month**



**janis: little girl blue**  
released 09/05/2016



**victoria**  
also available on blu-ray  
released 23/05/2016



**the assassin**  
also available on blu-ray  
released 23/05/2016



**a war**  
also available on blu-ray  
released 09/05/2016



**black mountain poets**  
out now

**the propaganda game**  
released 16/05/2016

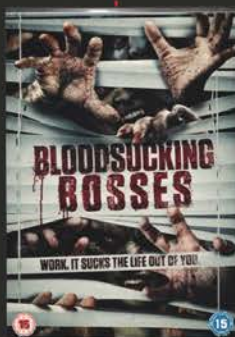


**desert dancer**  
released 23/05/2016

**follow the money: series 1**  
also available on blu-ray  
out now



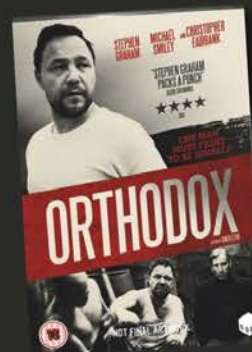
**bloodsucking bosses**  
released 16/05/2016



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**the lesson**  
released 09/05/2016



**orthodox**  
released 16/05/2016

## the fopp list

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# Editorial Nick James



## ABOMINABLE SHOWMEN

One interesting claim Agnieszka Holland made in our recent interview with her ('Staying power', *S&S*, May) is that, just as the liberalism of TV's *The West Wing* (1999-2006) was the perfect entrée to the election of Barack Obama, so the success of *House of Cards* (2013-), the saga of Frank and Claire Underwood's ruthless ascent to the Oval Office, has somehow laid the moral ground for the surprising success of Donald Trump in the US election primaries. I'm not qualified to assess the likelihood of this, but it does lead me to ponder why so many anglophone television shows are centred on people behaving abominably.

It's easy to reel off titles that demonstrate this fascination with the psychology of 'evil': the cheerful serial killers *Dexter* (2006-13) and *Hannibal* (2013-15), the political fixer series *Scandal* (2012-), *The Borgias* (2011-13): "The most powerful, immoral, bloodthirsty bunch that you could wish for," as Jeremy Irons had it in the trailer. One thinks, too, of appalling villains like posh arms dealer Roper in *The Night Manager* (and what an apt concept 'managing the night' is in this context, with Tom Hiddleston's Jonathan Pine needing to have a psychopathic side in order to compete with Roper).

Of course, villains have always been with us and we've always had a love-hate relationship with them, especially in the fantasy and fairytale contexts of a series such as *Game of Thrones* (2011-). But the difference with the likes of *House of Cards* – a series credited with establishing Netflix as a major media power – is our capacity to go along with deeply twisted people not merely as antagonists but as main protagonists.

This focus in television drama probably started with Tony Soprano, himself a direct descendant of gangster movies like *Goodfellas* (1990), but it goes beyond the antiquated notion of 'The Gangster as Tragic Hero', once so eloquently argued by Robert Warshaw. Writing in the late 1940s, Warshaw thought the job of popular culture in the US was to maintain a cheerful state of mind in the populace, and that this meant that all cynicism and mistrust of society had to be offloaded on to the movie gangster figure – only through his rise and fall could the American dream be presented as the nightmare it was for many. Warshaw's flaw was that he failed to see the *noir* under his nose, and popular culture was soon getting a bad rap precisely because of its encouragement of antisocial behaviour. Yet, if what we watch on TV today is any indication of US and UK national attitudes, it seems we're now content to see politicians as the moral equivalents of gangsters and serial killers, if not as the tragic enactors of our own suppressed fantasies.

Given that contentment, it's odd that we haven't seen much of this strain in the cinema, though there are exceptions. Scorsese's *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013) puts high finance in the dock, but shows the charismatic side of one its slickest con-men. Tarantino's *The Hateful*



*Villains have always been with us, but the difference with the likes of 'House of Cards' is our capacity to go along with twisted people as the main protagonists*

*Eight* (2015) trades on the nastiness of its ensemble and, though its ostensible central figure, Samuel L. Jackson's Major Warren, has the justification of racial vengeance, he also has a profoundly sadistic side.

Notwithstanding these, one wonders if the wider absence of Frank and Claire Underwood-type figures in cinema is merely an indication of TV drama's ability to respond quicker to events, or even to anticipate them. Perhaps some charismatic, corrupt portrait of hero-villainy is even now being cooked up in Hollywood, but it's just taking longer to reach us. Or is it simply that in order to create such a complex entanglement of motive and consequence you need the binge-watch running times of a whole series.

Most Westerners living in Warshaw's post-war period knew what they had just defeated and were unlikely to want to see a dissembling rabble-rouser prevail again. John Wayne's hate-filled racist Ethan Edwards in John Ford's classic western *The Searchers* (1956) may get the dirty job done of bringing back his kidnapped niece, but the price he pays is exile from society. The more laconic ruthlessness of Patricia Highsmith's Ripley character – as perhaps best portrayed by Alain Delon in René Clément's *Plein soleil* (1962) – mirrors the way that guilty participants of the war had to lie low and not get found out. These figures are nothing like *Dexter*, *Hannibal* or the Underwoods. Frank and Claire have a sophistication that, in the end, is nothing to do with Donald Trump. They are the Macbeths of our time, and as much a tribute to Shakespearean analysis of power's capacity to corrupt as they are reminder that Machiavellians sometimes win. **S**



IN THE FRAME

## CLUB CLASS



(Clockwise from top left) Andrea Arnold's *American Honey*, Winding Refn's *The Neon Demon*, the Dardenne's *The Unknown Girl*, Cristian Mungiu's *Bacalaureat*

There's no doubt that this year's Cannes offers a formidable roster of talent, but the festival needs to do more to foster inclusivity

By Nick Bradshaw

Spring once more is sprung, and here again comes the Cannes Film Festival (11-22 May), accompanied by its now familiar chorus of hecklers – “usual suspects”, “boys’ club”, “#CannesSoWhite” – decrying the festival’s snail’s pace of evolution towards something reflecting 21st-century diversity. No wonder Cannes’ delegate general Thierry Frémaux disdains the selfies, tweets and other tools of digital snap-judgement.

Cannes, in Frémaux’s telling, is where democracy hands off to meritocracy, where the

best and brightest ascend from the babble of the commons for high-table veneration. “Cannes is Cannes,” he instructed *ScreenDaily* apropos this year’s selection. “In a World Cup rugby match, they put the best players on the pitch. At Cannes, we select the best films. Cannes is the world championship of cinema... There are millions of people who like to run. If I go to watch the Olympics, however, I want to see Usain Bolt, not Mr Whoever who goes running every Sunday morning with his dog.” Tempting as it is to stretch the analogy to the phenomenon of aged footballers selected on reputation, the issue is a wider one: when does a meritocracy ossify?

Frémaux and his team filleted this year’s selection of 49 titles (including 20 in Competition and another 17 in Un Certain Regard) from 1,869 submissions, a number that seems to rise each year as implacably as global temperatures.

Twenty-eight countries are represented, and there are seven first-feature filmmakers among the 49 – so it’s easy to sympathise with Frémaux’s weary truism, in an interview with *Variety*: “People talk about known directors because they’re known, but we must talk about unknown directors who could be famous in the future.” So it is that Cannes veterans Ken Loach (making his 12th Competition appearance with *I, Daniel Blake*), Jim Jarmusch (his seventh with *Paterson*, plus a midnight screening of his Stooges doc *Gimme Danger*), Pedro Almodóvar (his fifth with *Julieta*), the Dardenne (their seventh with *The Unknown Girl*) and Olivier Assayas (his fifth with *Personal Shopper*) are joined by Canadian wunderkind Xavier Dolan (competing for the second time with *It’s Only the End of the World*), Alain Guiraudie (*Rester Vertical*, following his 2013 Un Certain Regard-awarded *Stranger by the Lake*), Brazil’s

### Brighton Festival

The artist and filmmaker Laurie Anderson (right) guest directs this year’s programme (7-29 May). Alongside her latest feature ‘Heart of a Dog’, she has picked a number of home movies – the festival’s theme is ‘home and place’ – among them Chantal Akerman’s swansong ‘No Home Movie’ and Sandhya Suri’s archive essay ‘I for India’.



### Real to Reel: A Century of War Movies

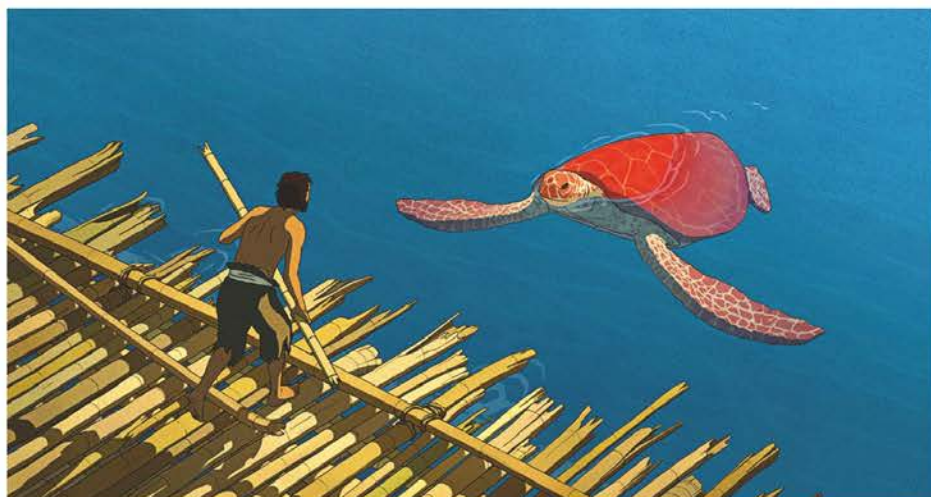
This exhibition at London’s Imperial War Museum (1 July – 8 January 2017) coincides with screenings of the 1916 British documentary ‘The Battle of the Somme’ at BFI Southbank, and marks the event’s 100th anniversary. Offering a peek behind the scenes of classic war films, the exhibits include wartime artefacts, props, scripts and a Moy & Bastie cine camera (right) like the one used to shoot the landmark film.



© COURTESY OF THE IMPEL WAR MUSEUM







All at sea: Michaël Dudok de Wit's *The Red Turtle* is the only animation in the festival's official selection

Kleber Mendonça Filho (*Aquarius*, following his 2012 Rotterdam hit *Neighbouring Sounds*) and Jeff Nichols, whose *Loving* comes barely three months after his Berlinale thriller *Midnight Special*. Romania's Cristi Puiu (*Sieranevada*) also figures alongside his Palme d'Or-winning compatriot Cristian Mungiu (*Bacalaureat*); the Philippines' Brillante Mendoza makes his third Competition appearance with *Ma' Rosa*, and there are new titles from Park Chan-wook, Bruno Dumont, Sean Penn, Nicolas Winding Refn and Paul Verhoeven – the last here for the first time since *Basic Instinct* in 1992.

Somewhere amid this gamut of strapping scrum-halves and Old Masters (as well as the rugby analogy Frémaux compared his festival to the Louvre), there are some female filmmakers. Andrea Arnold (with *American Honey*) and Nicole Garcia (*From the Land of the Moon*) both compete for the third time, alongside new arrival Maren Ade (*Toni Erdmann*), whose 2003 debut *The Forest for the Trees* is an unsung gem. That trio constitute 15 per cent of the Competition titles; women directed eight of the 49 selections across the board. Frémaux brandished statistics suggesting industry standards were worse, but his parry that Cannes's gender lopsidedness is "a consequence, not the cause" of wider disparities was weak – we need to see the festival pushing for change. In support of Frémaux's thesis that parity at the film-school level will filter upwards, three of the programme's eight first-feature filmmakers are women: Stéphanie Di Giusto (*The Dancer*), Palestinian-Israeli Maha Haj (*Omar*

*Shakhsiya*) and Andrea Testa (co-director of *The Long Night of Francisco Sanctis*). On the other hand, only one of ten Competition shorts directors is.

Perhaps, after all, the festival needs to look to the constrictions in its own frame of reference. The real fallacy of Frémaux's 'cinema championship' is that athletes and sports people vie within defined game-rules; artists are meant to bend and break them – so the terms of excellence are moot. At a festival that vaunts its fluency with the world's finest filmmaking, smugness is more excusable than complacency, and when Frémaux says of his programme: "This is cinema in the spring of 2016", it's less true and certainly at variance with his parallel claim that "At Cannes, we specialise in the big auteurs." Critic Daniel Walber has pointed out that only five documentaries have shown in Competition at Cannes in the past 40 years; the current wave of nonfiction film art has almost completely passed the festival by. (Widen the scope across the non-official Critics' Week and Directors' Fortnight sidebars, as Gianfranco Rosi's *Oeil d'Or* jury will have to do, and you'll find all of five new docs this year, notably Laura Poitras's Julian Assange study *Risk*.) Ditto animation. Michaël Dudok de Wit's Studio Ghibli production *The Red Turtle* is this year's tantalising exception that proves the rule. A jury led by the director of *Mad Max* and *Happy Feet*, George Miller, might have been open to its ecumenical artistry – but it's not been put on the main pitch. 📺



For our rolling coverage of Cannes, visit [bfi.org.uk/sightandsound](http://bfi.org.uk/sightandsound)

## LISTOMANIA WAR SATIRES

Tina Fey's war-on-terror comedy *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*, released in UK cinemas this month, stands in a long tradition of war satires

- 1 **The Great Dictator** (1940, below)  
Charles Chaplin
- 2 **Dr. Strangelove** (1964)  
Stanley Kubrick
- 3 **How I Won the War** (1967)  
Richard Lester
- 4 **The Human Bullet** (1968)  
Okamoto Kihachi
- 5 **Oh! What a Lovely War** (1969)  
Richard Attenborough
- 6 **Catch-22** (1970)  
Mike Nichols
- 7 **MASH** (1970)  
Robert Altman
- 8 **Buffalo Soldiers** (2001)  
Gregor Jordan
- 9 **No Man's Land** (2001)  
Danis Tanovic
- 10 **Team America: World Police** (2004)  
Trey Parker



## QUOTE OF THE MONTH NICHOLAS RAY

'No director I've known has ever been able to breathe talent into an actor. Don't try it. You can't breathe in the talent, but you can breathe in imagination'

Nicholas Ray's  
*Johnny Guitar* is  
rereleased in UK  
cinemas on 3 May



## Sundance London

This annual selection of highlights from the Sundance festival is thankfully relocating this year from the London O2's bland multiplex to Picturehouse Central, from 2-5 June. Although a few Park City hits, such as Nate Parker's 'The Birth of a Nation' and Kelly Reichardt's 'Certain Women' sadly aren't in the mix, we're looking forward to Todd Solondz's 'Wiener-Dog' (right), Sian Heder's 'Tallulah' and James Schamus's 'Indignation'.



## The Rainer Werner Fassbinder collection

Arrow Films' latest limited-edition Blu-ray extravaganza features restorations of ten of the German director's greatest films – including 'Love Is Colder Than Death' (1969) and 'The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant' (1972). Among the tempting extras are two early shorts, plus a pair of documentaries about him – one by his editor Juliane Lorenz and another, 'Role-Play: Women on Fassbinder', featuring interviews with his actresses.





# CASE SENSITIVE

In movies all baggage is emotional, signalling self-sufficiency, insecurity, availability – or simply that you can afford Louis Vuitton



**By Hannah McGill**

Transporting the bare essentials of life around in a case can be the sign of a lonely life, a riskily unfettered one, or both. In László

Benedek's 1951 film of *Death of a Salesman* and Volker Schlöndorff's 1985 television version, the weighty cases borne by Willy Loman clearly signify the burdens of memory and regret he carries with him, but also his ceaseless movement through an increasingly fragmented modern world of disposable mass-produced goods and impermanent arrangements. Secreted in Willy's suitcases along with the goods he sells are the silk stockings he gifts to his mistress. A somewhat more glamorous figure, but an even more extreme case of such modern itinerancy and detachment, is the perpetually airborne protagonist of *Up in the Air* (2009); the film might have spawned numerous admiring articles about how to dress, pack and fly like George Clooney, but his character's snappy speeches about travelling light mask a secret yen for security and the love of a good woman.

The idea that there's something emasculated or sad about a man having to pack his life into a suitcase – he's either failed at being rugged enough not to need any stuff, or failed at securing a place for his stuff and a woman to look after it – peaks in Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Three Colours White* (1993), in which the destitute and sexually humiliated protagonist is transported out of his abject existence hidden inside a suitcase. The success of the family road trip in Wes Anderson's *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007), meanwhile, rests on the jettisoning of the baggage the brothers have brought along – though typically for a director preoccupied by elegant dysfunction, the suitcases themselves are as whimsically gorgeous as they are cumbersome. The 11-item set seen in the film was custom designed by Marc Jacobs for Louis Vuitton, for where baggage is presented as desirable, it tends to be real-world luxury branding that makes it so. James Bond burdens a porter with multiple Louis Vuitton items in *A View to a Kill* (1985); and if the most recent Bonds



Suitable cases for treatment: *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007)

have been rather less ostentatious, a Globe-Trotter Spectre 30-inch extra-deep wheeled suitcase will still set fans back £1,560 from Harrods.

Themes of emotional baggage and dependence also surface in Valerio Zurlini's *Girl with a Suitcase* (1961). The fact that Claudia Cardinale's abandoned girl is carrying all that she owns invests her with both vulnerability and a whiff of sexual promise. A woman carrying all she needs for an overnight stay projects that it will be herself, not a parent, husband or boyfriend, who'll decide where she's going to sleep. In *Charade* (1963), more Louis Vuitton communicates that Audrey Hepburn's newly widowed Reggie is now responsible for her

own actions and safety, while the contents of an overnight bag left behind by her husband confirm that he has left her in significant peril.

The most enduring of macguffins – or even, as the Russian novelist Viktor Pelevin has argued, the main protagonist in contemporary culture – is the anonymous case stuffed with money. From *The Three Stooges* through Sergio Leone to Danny Boyle, money in physical, transportable form has a dramatic potential that's difficult to achieve with an online bank transfer. The 2013 film *Kumiko, the Treasure Hunter*, based on an urban legend that grew up around a real-life suicide, centres on a young woman travelling from Japan to Minnesota in the mistaken belief that she



*Kiss Me Deadly* (1955)



*Girl with a Suitcase* (1961)



*What's Up, Doc?* (1972)





*A woman carrying all she needs for an overnight stay projects that it will be herself who'll decide where she's going to sleep*

might actually be able to find the money buried by the criminals in *Fargo* (1996). But who needs a little bit of money, when you can have a 'Great Whatsit'? The suitcase whose contents are so mystically powerful that they don't even need to be revealed has been a film-buff fetish object since *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) packed all nuclear paranoia into one compact carry-on. It's never wholly clear what's inside the *Kiss Me Deadly* valise, but it's hot, it glows and it provided a plotting idea enduring or easy enough to have inspired tribute acts in *Repo Man* (1984), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Ronin* (1998) and *Somebody up There Likes Me* (2012).

A free-spirited girl, an emasculated man, accumulated emotional baggage and objects of untold value all collide in *What's Up, Doc?* (1972), wherein very different agendas are served by four identical-looking tartan suitcases. Here the key to carrying away what you really need with you is the understanding that who you are, whom you belong with, what you have and what you're worth are all mutable, as long as you're willing to risk the odd mix-up at the baggage claim. 6

## THE FIVE KEY...

# JANE AUSTEN ADAPTATIONS

Her understated, ironic romances have been not just a godsend for the movie industry but almost a movie industry in themselves

By Simran Hans

Though Jane Austen was writing well before the invention of film, the British author's writing laid the groundwork for the neurotic heroines that would go on to serve as the linchpin of romantic comedy. And it's not only her heroines who form the blueprint for the genre – it's her prose too. It was Austen who popularised free indirect speech (reported thoughts rather than speech made possible by the slippage between characters and their narrators), a trope that appears in romcoms from *Clueless* to *You've Got Mail* to *Bridget Jones's Diary*. With Whit Stillman's *Love & Friendship* – a riff on her posthumously published novella *Lady Susan* – released this month, here are five key Austen adaptations.



## 1 Clueless (1995)

Amy Heckerling's *Clueless* captures the spirit of the overachieving heroine of *Emma*, Austen's sharp satire on the structure of self-satisfied genteel society. Updating the story by transforming Austen's gossipy golden girl into a Californian high-school princess with a Valley Girl accent, Alicia Silverstone's Cher is as charming – and as short on self-awareness – as her literary inspiration.



## 2 Pride and Prejudice (1995)

Simon Langton's BBC TV miniseries, scripted by Andrew Davies, unfolds in novelistic detail over six hour-long episodes. Colin Firth charms as the brooding, emotionally withholding Mr Darcy, though his Darcy is best remembered for the infamous 'white shirt' scene – not in the novel – in which he literally drips sex appeal, emerging soaking wet from an impromptu swim.



## 3 Sense and Sensibility (1995)

Director Ang Lee and screenwriter Emma Thompson reimagined Austen's first published novel, focusing on the financial predicament of the Dashwood sisters – the difficulties of women who did not inherit money and had no way of earning it – giving Austen's social commentary a new lease of feminist life. She's excellent as Elinor Dashwood too, seething passion buried beneath the sense to Kate Winslet's sensibility.



## 4 Bridget Jones's Diary (2001)

This adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* is a snapshot of Blairite Britain, with Austen's most beloved heroine recast as a slovenly singleton who "smokes like a chimney, drinks like a fish and dresses like her mother". Renée Zellweger's Bridget channels Elizabeth Bennet's neuroses (though not necessarily much pride). The casting of Colin Firth as the straitlaced Mark Darcy is a neat intertextual nod to the 1995 BBC series.



## 5 Bride & Prejudice (2004)

*Bridget Jones's Diary* might nail Darcy, but surely the most ingenious iteration of *Pride and Prejudice*'s Lizzie Bennett is Aishwarya Rai Bachchan's Lalita Bakshi. Gurinder Chadha's all-singing, all-dancing Bollywood take is flawed but worth watching for the way Chadha playfully matches the novel's gossipy, overbearing matriarch, its prissy, intellectual heroine and its boy-crazy sisters with their Indian counterparts.



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# BODY HEAT

Channing Tatum has always been comfortable with his onscreen physicality – he's the Jane Russell of modern movies



By Mark Cousins

Channing Tatum – or is it Tatum Channing? He looks like either. Unless he has a side parting, as in *Hail, Caesar!*, his face is precisely

symmetrical, his brow and eye-lines horizontal. A geometric face with a mid-distance look.

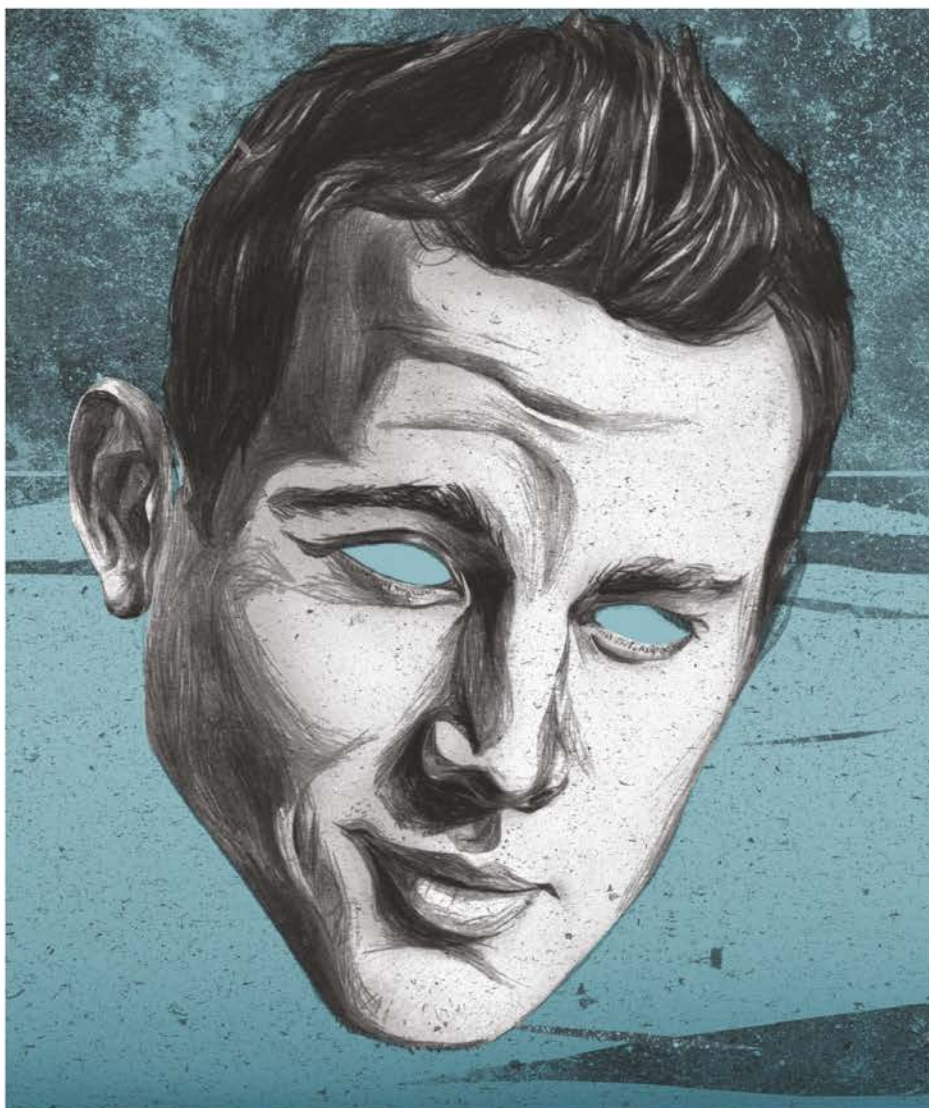
But that's the thing about movie stars. Their faces should be enigmatic. When those close-ups come – and they seldom do for Tatum – too much expression makes them noisy. A close-up should be quiet.

What shouldn't be quiet is the body. Chaplin's wasn't, nor was Cyd Charisse's or Rita Hayworth's, Louise Brooks's or Marlon Brando's. Nor is Tatum's. In *21 Jump Street*, he's a cop who wants car chases but only gets to rescue Frisbees.

He's a crap jock cop who has to go undercover as someone – so the police captain tells him – “really stupid, so you should blend right in”. His body's ahead of his head, like a teenager's, and he plays it beautifully, this boy-man who's frustrated or humiliated.

Which brings in the politics. Tatum comes from a working-class background. He went from roofer to stripper. He's great at anti-Michael Bay men who aren't pumped by their own ego. Class, poverty and gentleness have stopped them getting to that hyper-masculine place that Hollywood seems – just – to believe in, despite the collateral damage it causes. In *Magic Mike* (2012), which is based on some of his own experiences, his character knows where his power lies, and where it doesn't. He has a body and moves, and makes the best of both, as they won't last forever, and he knows it. So he shines for as long as he can shine, but isn't Icarus, isn't one of those Tennessee Williams characters who suddenly find themselves alone because they thought they had it all and didn't look ahead. If you're working class and pretty and bright, you know the clock is ticking and that when the looks go the tide will go out and you'll be left where you started.

If we didn't know where to fit Tatum into movie history, *Hail, Caesar!* showed us. His dance scene was like an out-take from *On the Town* (1949), but it's the Gene Kelly of *Singin' in the Rain* (1951) or even *It's Always Fair Weather* (1955) that seemed to come alive in that Coens number. Kelly's face was identikit, too, but his body polyglot, like Tatum's: put it on a movie screen and you've got life. Think of other aspects of 50s cinema and we can refine who Channing Tatum is. Is he a king actor like John Wayne or Orson Welles? No way. In *Foxcatcher* (2014) he was a supplicant. But nor is he much of a detective driven by scepticism in a world where the law is dead. He's a pawn, moved around by others – social forces, or rich women – and he's not enraged by that. Far from it. His characters might vote Bernie (or even Trump) because



*Channing Tatum's nakedness is more Ewan McGregor than Charlton Heston. It's not polished; it's euphoric and less controlled*

they're on the bottom of the heap, and so outside politics, but they know how to enjoy things now.

Anxious 50s actors like Montgomery Clift or James Dean always wanted to escape the moment, the agony, their own skin. Tatum is the opposite of that. There's a short film, *The Trap* (2007), in which he has a simple scene. He's at the top of a trapeze ladder; a woman climbs it. She's terrified, and for more than three minutes he just reassures and comforts her. And enjoys it. Hyper-masculinity can't stand being around women, but Tatum's characters clearly love it – not to boss them, just because of the attraction, the feeling of being intimate, useful and entertaining. For the discourse.

In the scene in question, Tatum is topless, a state of undress to which he is not averse. You could say that this is the 50s thing too – think of Victor Mature and all those peplum films – but Tatum's nakedness is more Ewan McGregor than

Charlton Heston (another of those names that could be reversed). Back then, men seemed to display their bodies unconsciously. They didn't get, or pretended they didn't get, any pleasure from being looked at. Ewan McGregor was really clear: *yes, I love getting my ass out, and love you looking at it*. Tatum is equally cool on this. It's not polished, like metrosexual is polished; it's more euphoric, and far less controlled.

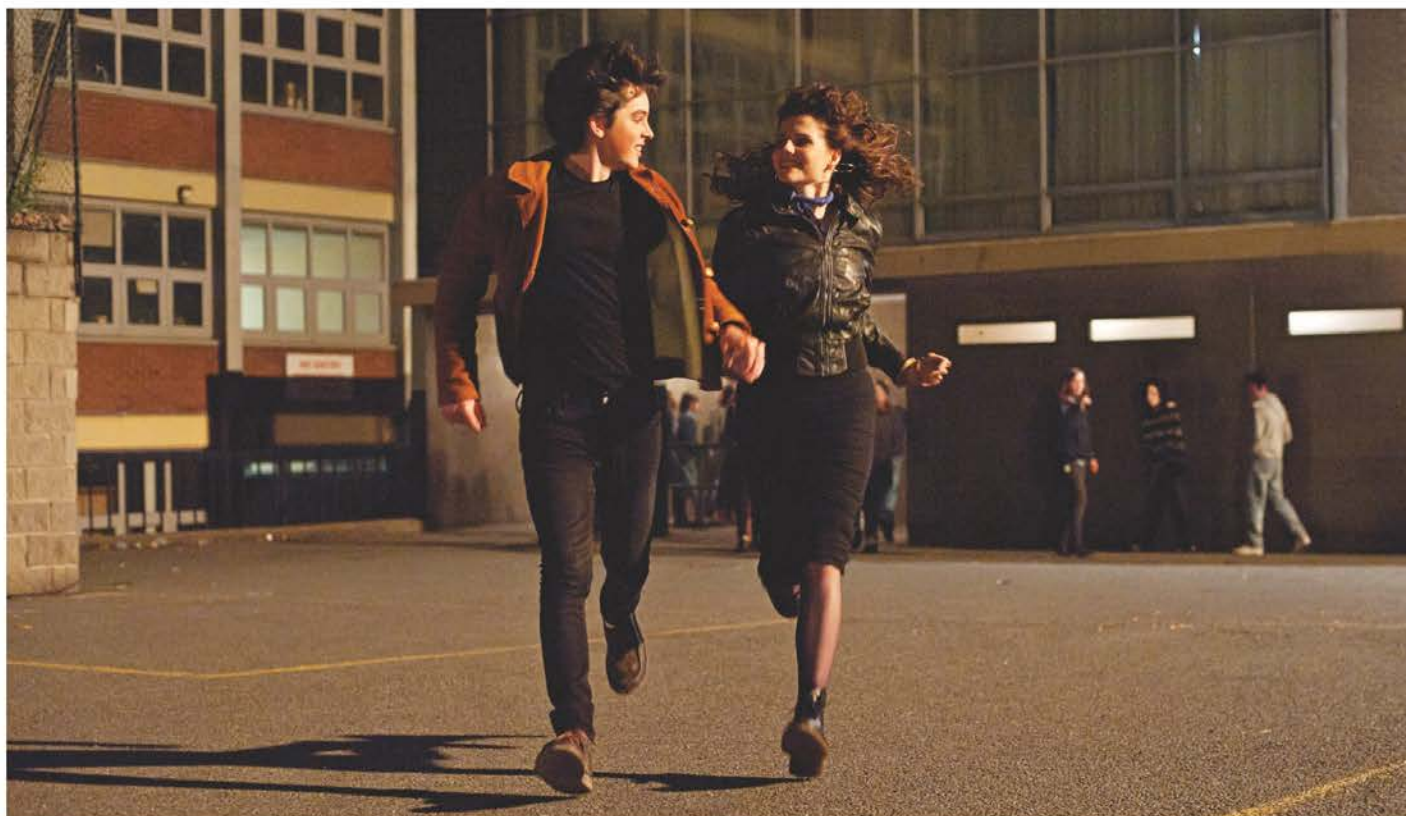
To say this makes me realise who Channing Tatum really resembles. Don't laugh: Jane Russell. I knew her a bit and she was un-neurotic, funny and up for a laugh. If Tatum is a woman's man, Russell was a man's woman – she had loads of brothers and behaved like a cowgirl. Despite being religious, you can see in her movies what unfettered pleasure she took in her own body. If you haven't seen her 'Lookin' for Trouble' number in *The French Line* (1953), look it up online. It's sexy, *outré*, complicit and probably censorable. She's as comfortable in her body, in its sexuality, and the humour of that, as Tatum, and the scene reminds me of one of the *Magic Mike* routines.

As some critics raved about *Magic Mike XXL* (2015) I saw it and regretted it. I was bored. But Channing Tatum was once again Jane Russell and Ewan McGregor. ☺



DEVELOPMENT TALE

## SING STREET



Schoolyard heroes: Ferdia Walsh-Peelo and Lucy Boynton

John Carney broke into Hollywood – then went home to Dublin to make a film about his own youth as a would-be 80s pop star

**By Charles Gant**

It was nearly a decade ago, just after completing his breakthrough feature *Once* (2007), that John Carney had a burst of inspiration for a new film. Travelling on the London Underground, spying a schoolboy carrying a guitar case, he was brought back to his own mid-1980s Dublin school days, and his own band – pretentiously named La Vie.

“It gave me this flash of what a great image that is, of the grey school uniform and the drabness of it, and the repetition of school life,” Carney says. “The freedom that this guitar suggested, and the freedom that music offers, and the idea of girls and music were married into this guitar. As a filmmaker, you want to feel something strongly so that each day you’re at work you can be sure about what you’re creating.”

Carney had transferred to the tough Synge Street Christian Brothers boys secondary school from a fee-paying establishment after a downturn in family fortunes, and he borrowed that fish-out-of-water idea for Conor, the 15-year-old protagonist of *Sing Street*. “I wrote down ideas about it, and pitched it to a few people. My pitch would go, ‘I was a posh kid

who went to a rough school. I formed this band and the band became a survival thing.’ You see somebody smiling or identifying with it. So you start to get an instinct for where reality ends and begins and where the story ends and begins and where those two things overlap.”

*Sing Street* started to become a reality after a conversation with producer Anthony Bregman during the summer 2012 shoot of the director’s *Begin Again*. “We were making a film with Keira Knightley in New York, and we had wrapped for the evening,” Carney says. “Anthony was saying: ‘What are you going to do next?’ I said to myself, after this experience, it was a great film to make, but it felt like I was really ready to go back to what I knew, Irish actors that I know. I really didn’t want to be around that energy of movie star. So I just pitched that story to him.

“I was, like, ‘Is this a bad move?’ I was getting pitched all these offers for films with movie stars. And he was, ‘No, that’s a great idea to go back to Ireland and make a smaller film. Now is the right time to do that.’ That just gave me encouragement, and I jumped at the opportunity to work with him again.”

Carney fully relocated to Dublin at the start of 2014, and started to convert his outline into a screenplay. One challenge was that the music is so integral to the film – Conor’s band Sing Street creates at least half a dozen songs over the course of the narrative, with lyrics influenced by the film’s events – that composition of songs needed

to go hand in hand. Luckily, funds were flowing in from the hit Broadway production of the *Once* stage musical, and Carney was able to put together a five-piece band and hire a studio for an extended period, right next to his own office. This also proved a creative fillip for his own writing.

“I get very bored very quickly, so if I’m writing and I do an hour’s work, I’ve had enough,” says Carney. “All I need is an injection in the arm of something to get me back, and the music was perfect because I’d get bored, and I’d go in, and we’d knock out a chorus or an idea or a lyric, and I’d be buzzed up by that, and motivated to put that into the script, or let that idea suggest a whole scenario, and I’d run back into the office. And then I’d find, ‘Oh, I’ve done three hours today instead of one.’”

Steadily, *Sing Street* moved away from the purely autobiographical, including a love interest for Conor: “I started off with the mantra that this was my memoir. When you make a film, you really do lose control over that.”

Another consideration was that casting choices would affect the scenarios and the dialogue. “I started to cast the movie as I started to write the music and the script,” Carney says. “I promised myself I wouldn’t make the film if I couldn’t get the right kid, and I couldn’t get really catchy, good music. There’d be no point.” Bregman and his producer partners were confident they could finance the film without the need for stars – newcomer Ferdia



Walsh-Peelo was cast in the lead, opposite Lucy Boynton – although adding hot young actor Jack Reynor as Conor's elder brother didn't hurt. Aidan Gillen and Maria Doyle Kennedy also took roles as Conor's newly separated parents.

In *Sing Street*, Conor and his bandmates are discovering music at a rapid rate, and amusingly showcase their latest enthusiasm in their songwriting, clothes and haircuts. That added another layer of complexity, since so many scenes were dependent on specific music clearances.

"All the songs in the movie are in the script. I didn't want to substitute anything," Carney says. "I was: 'If we can't get that song, I'm not doing that scene. That scene is built around that song. To replace it will just be bad filmmaking.'" There followed a lot of begging letters to songwriters pleading for deals on songs, which in the film pivotally include *The Cure*, and Daryl Hall and John Oates.

In so doing, Carney takes a rather free view of 80s music chronology, placing Duran Duran's 1982 'Rio' video on a 1985 edition of *Top of the Pops*. "Certain films pay exquisite and very specific attention to the detail of their period," he says. "And I respect that, and that's great. But for this film, I gave myself a certain licence. As long as we don't get so anachronistic that there's stuff from the future happening, I'm not that concerned

*I promised myself I wouldn't make the film if I couldn't get the right kid, and I couldn't get really catchy, good music*

with being an 80s trainspotting movie."

As for the composed songs, Carney tracked down songwriters from the 1980s and subsequent eras, finding the right fit with Gary Clark, whose band Danny Wilson wrote 1988 hit 'Mary's Prayer'.

"I went out to so many people, asking for demos or ideas, and the mistake I made was I over-egged the 80s," says the filmmaker. "So you got these songs back that were parodies of 80s songs. And the great thing about Gary is, first he was around in the 80s, and second, he understood that the songs that are great from that era aren't particularly 80s songs, they're just great songs. The 80s thing was more in the production and the sound and the choice of instruments. The great songs of the 80s are great songs of any decade."

*Sing Street* shot in and around Dublin in the summer and autumn of 2014, waiting more than a year to premiere at Sundance this January, followed by a March cinema release in Ireland and Northern Ireland, grossing an impressive £746,000 at press time. "I spent a long time cutting the movie," explains Carney. "It was a lot of focusing on the love story and cutting back a lot of other stuff that just didn't sit – slightly more ambitious stuff, in terms of the family and the politics of the time. It really became very clear to us all that this was a very simple love story. Everything should be serving that trajectory of boy meets girl, forms band, runs away." 📌

**i** *Sing Street* opens in mainland UK on May 20

## THE NUMBERS VICTORIA

By Charles Gant

It's an observable trend – or at least a common assumption – that the cinema audience for foreign-language and arthouse film is getting progressively older in the UK. Last year, acclaimed titles that might have attracted a younger demographic, including Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy's *The Tribe* and Mia Hansen-Løve's *Eden*, performed rather indifferently. But when Curzon Artificial Eye acquired Sebastian Schipper's single-shot wonder *Victoria* in Berlin last year, it was not discouraged.

"We were pretty determined that we wanted to try to find a younger audience," says Curzon head of theatrical Jon Rushton. "Our issue was that we worried they might be quite expensive to reach, for our level of advertising spend."

An opportunity came Curzon's way when it invited Fabien Riggall, the boss of Secret Cinema, which organises event film screenings in unusual locations, to *Victoria*'s BFI London Film Festival premiere last October. "We'd had a few conversations on previous films that hadn't panned out," Rushton explains; but this time the fit worked, with a 'Secret Cinema X' one-off event at London's Ministry of Sound nightclub. "From our point of view, we got the endorsement of Secret Cinema on all their marketing channels, and from Secret Cinema's point of view, they thought it was a really cool film to be involved with." Indeed, Secret Cinema, which has moved into the mainstream with immersive events themed around multiplex-friendly titles such as *Back to the Future* and this summer's *Dirty Dancing*, could do with the film's cool cachet.

Also teaming up with Berliner Pilsner to present special screenings at the Bussey Building (a warehouse converted into an arts venue) in Peckham and three London cinemas, with DJs and free beer, Curzon delivered an opening weekend of £109,000 including £25,000 in previews, and a total after three weeks of £362,000. Judging by *Victoria*'s strong performance in the



Alone in Berlin: Laia Costa in *Victoria*

later evening slot, and also anecdotally from cinema managers, the positioning strategy has worked. "We have gone younger than our films usually do," says Rushton, adding, "I still think it's mixed. A lot of our regular customers are coming out and giving it a chance."

Although *Victoria*, with its Berlin setting and Spanish and German romantic pairing, looks and feels like a foreign-language film, English is its dominant tongue. This offered Curzon a choice regarding subtitling. Explains Rushton, "There are two versions: one where you can only understand the dialogue that *Victoria* herself can understand – the German was not subtitled. And the subtitled version. The director said: 'It's up to you.'"

Curzon opted for the latter approach, feeling that one German-language sequence in an underground car park was too long for audiences not to be able to understand. Curzon also included subtitles in its trailer, feeling that this scene was crucial to communicating the storyline. "The problem with cutting out foreign language in a trailer, and we've done it, is then you are cutting around the film," says Rushton. "The ideal for us is just to cut the best trailer and trust that the audience will come." 📌

### GERMAN-LANGUAGE FILMS AT THE UK BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
The Lives of Others	2007	£2,700,311
Downfall	2005	£1,903,407
Good Bye, Lenin!	2003	£1,243,907
Pina	2011	£666,263
The Counterfeiters	2007	£661,069
The White Ribbon	2009	£647,896
Run Lola Run	1999	£476,066
The Baader Meinhof Complex	2008	£427,074
The Nasty Girl	1991	£385,446
Victoria (mixed language)	2016	£362,088*

\*gross at press time




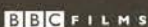
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HONG KONG INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

## TROUBLE AHEAD

Some brave programming turned a critical spotlight on the Chinese regime – and showcased a host of fine filmmakers in the process

By Tony Rayns

*Ten Years* (Shi Nian or, in Cantonese, *Sap Nin*) became a Hong Kong *cause célèbre* earlier this year when it was abruptly pulled from commercial distribution without explanation, despite grossing a higher per-screen average than *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. The film is a five-episode omnibus, made completely outside what's left of the Hong Kong film industry, in which five new directors project five to ten years into the future their anxieties about China's promise to allow Hong Kong "a high degree of autonomy" until 2046. There are moments of wry humour, but the general mood is deeply pessimistic. One (fictional) speaker compares China's communist party leaders with gangsters; one director imagines ruinous, China-led dirty tricks in the 2020 elections to secure the passage of a new security bill (the better to control Hong Kong citizens), and another imagines the outlawing of the word *boondei* ('local') and the indoctrination of primary-schoolers as 'youth guards' in 2025.

In the circumstances, it was quite brave of the Hong Kong International Film Festival to screen the film in its Hong Kong Panorama section. Just after the festival ended, *Ten Years* won Best Film in the Hong Kong Film Awards – at a ceremony that China's Central Television chose not to broadcast. Coming right after the pro-democracy 'Umbrella Movement' protests of 2015, all of this widens the chasm between China and its 'special administrative region' Hong Kong.

The film itself is a fine surprise. The episodes vary in ambition, angle of approach and effectiveness – always the way in omnibus movies – but the overall tone is grown-up and engaging. The weakest episode is the most sombre: Chow Kwun-Wai's *Self-Immolator* is half mockumentary, half clunky docudrama and all overcooked political rhetoric. Jevons Au's *Dialect* offers a series of witty vignettes about a 2025 taxi driver who can't grasp China's national language *putonghua*. Ng Ka-Leung (also the project's co-ordinator) imagines in *Local Egg* that Hong Kong will go through its own version of Mao's Cultural Revolution as mainland strictures are imposed on the former colony. Zune Kwok's black-and-white *Extras* is a dark political satire on the ways China tries to browbeat the Hong Kong electorate into accepting its controls; it features the excellent Wang Hongwei (Jia Zhangke's *Xiao Wu* himself) as the mainland politician. And Wong Fei-Pang in *Season of the End* goes for strange, stylised sci-fi with a fable about a young man and woman driving each other mad as they experiment with ways to reconstruct everything that's been lost in the Hong Kong of 2025. In its way, *Ten Years* is as spirited an act of resistance as the recent films of Iranian director Jafar Panahi.



Anxiety of influence: omnibus *Ten Years* offers a bleak assessment of China's future in Hong Kong

There are subtler hints of trouble ahead for China's leadership in two of the Chinese indies highlighted in the festival. In his second feature *River* (*Gtsngbo*), Tibetan director Sonthar Gyal focuses on the precarious survival of one nomadic family: black-sheep husband, pregnant wife and questioning four-year-old daughter. As in his debut *The Sun-Beaten Path* (which he discussed when he visited the London Film Festival in 2011), a near plotless emphasis on everyday realities provides a minimal cover for an angry reflection on unhealed wounds – in this case, the life-wrecking depredations of the Cultural Revolution. Artful images and finely calibrated patterns

*In its way, the omnibus film 'Ten Years' is as spirited an act of resistance as the recent films of Iranian director Jafar Panahi*



*Ten Years*

of repetition/variation tell the underlying tale, a coda to the 'Fifth Generation' films of the 1980s, but one specific to Tibet.

And Zhang Hanyu's striking debut *Life After Life* (*Zhifan Yemao*, winner of the festival's top award for 'Young Cinema') chronicles the evacuation of villages in Shaanxi Province across the story of a dead mother whose spirit returns to possess her teenage son; her aim is simply to secure the survival of one tree which has special meaning for her. The tale unfolds almost exclusively in stately, wide-angle shots; one of the few close-ups shows a family of mice clinging to existence inside an old wardrobe. Zhang uses peasant beliefs in reincarnation and spirit-possession to anchor a picture of failing family ties, uprooted communities and land subsidences caused by abandoned coalmines. The storyline is a simple 'what if...?', but it finds the forlorn spiritual dimension in very precise, concrete images of Shaanxi villages and landscapes. The undemonstrative performances are almost Bressonian, and so is Zhang's heartrending refusal to resort to melodrama.

HKIFF's longstanding collaboration with the video website YouKu (now rebranded as Heyi Pictures) hit new highs in the four-part *Beautiful 2016*. All four episodes this year are decent and touching; Stanley Kwan's *One Day in Our Lives of...* is excellent, a veiled tribute to the late Anita Mui through the story of a troubled diva (Cecilia Yip) coming out of retirement to record a song. And Jia Zhangke's *The Hedonists* (*Yingsheng*) is a showstopper, a funny/sad tale of three unemployed miners – their faces will be familiar to fans of Jia's films – trying for ridiculous new jobs as bodyguards and theme-park actors. 🍷





**BLACK WIDOW**

In Whit Stillman's *Love & Friendship*, Kate Beckinsale (right) plays Lady Susan Vernon, a widow who is hoping to find a husband for herself and her daughter, while Chloë Sevigny (left) plays her confidante Alicia





# THE WICKED LADY

*Whit Stillman's delightfully acid Jane Austen adaptation, 'Love & Friendship', takes great pleasure in its self-centred heroine's appalling duplicity. Here the director explains his great affinity for the writer and why there's not a sentence in her work that he doesn't feel close to*

**By Philip Concannon**

**"Almost everything Jane Austen wrote,** looked at from today's perspective, is absurd," Tom Townsend tells Audrey Rouget in *Metropolitan* when he learns she is reading *Mansfield Park*, the novel the film is loosely inspired by. "Has it ever occurred to you that today looked at from Jane Austen's perspective would look even worse?" she responds. *Love & Friendship* may be Whit Stillman's first direct screen adaptation of Jane Austen's work, but the spirit of Austen has infused every film he has made to date. *Metropolitan* (1989), *Barcelona* (1994), *The Last Days of Disco* (1998) and *Damsels in Distress* (2011) are all comedies of manners focusing on enclosed societies, distinguished by elegant, droll dialogue. It's hard to imagine a filmmaker more ideally suited to bringing Austen's sharp, affectionately critical work to the screen.

Fittingly, Stillman's adaptation of Austen's epistolary novella *Lady Susan* feels just as much a part of his world as hers. Lady Susan Vernon, the book's duplicitous and manipulative protagonist, is brought to life here by a perfectly cast Kate Beckinsale, and she could easily be a distant relation to Charlotte, the conceited character the actress played in *The Last Days of Disco*. *Lady Susan* might be an early Austen work that has failed to garner the acclaim of her later masterpieces, but there is a





slyly biting quality to its dialogue that distinguishes it—and which matches Stillman's own. "My dear Alicia," Lady Susan writes in one letter, "of what a mistake were you guilty in marrying a man of his age!—just old enough to be formal, ungovernable, and to have the gout; too old to be agreeable, too young to die."

Stillman seamlessly incorporates this language to deliberately entertaining effect, but the sparkling quality of *Love & Friendship* underlines how frustrating it is that this is only the director's fifth film. There have been numerous false starts and abandoned projects in the quarter-century since his feature debut (including an attempt to merge two unfinished Austen works, *The Watsons* and *Sanditon*, into a film), and detours into television and novel-writing, but *Love & Friendship* is a reminder that the Stillman touch is as recognisable, rare and valuable on the big screen as that of Ernst Lubitsch.

I met the director during one of his recent stopovers in London en route to Paris, where he lives, to talk about the film and the 30-plus years he's spent working within the constantly shifting world of independent cinema.

**Philip Concannon:** What is the secret to Jane Austen's enduring appeal?

**Whit Stillman:** There are all kinds of special reasons. It's not just that the texture of the material has both

*It's important to allow adaptations to go at their own pace, and original scripts too. It's important that you don't force material that isn't ready yet*

humorous and romantic intrigue built into it, but she naturally imbued whatever she worked on with deep structure. *Lady Susan*, as a novella, is problematical in many ways. It's really inaccessible in letter format and there are a lot of other inaccessible things about it, but now looking backwards from the adaptation of the story as a film, it has a motor that's really humming.

It took a long time to get that. It wasn't a work experience, it was a time experience. In the early noughties it just struck me as really rich material—it had something in it—but it was going to take forever for the structure and the form to become clear. So I said this was not something I was going to have as an assignment for a studio or a film company, it's just something I'm going to work on when I can between other things. It's not the kind of thing where you want people waiting for your draft, because I got in a trap where I was turning in drafts of things because I needed the money—I needed my health insurance in the Writers' Guild, things like that—and also because the producers are pressing you. It's important to allow adaptations to go at their own pace, and original scripts too. It's important that you don't force material that isn't ready yet.

**PC:** While it may be somewhat inaccessible, does the epistolary format allow you a greater freedom in adaptation than a more straightforward novel?

**WS:** We abandoned almost all traces of letters. We still have a suggestion of a few things, but it's mostly the De Courcys reading a letter from their daughter in the film now. When people are at the beginning of a form there's something very exciting and very rich in that. Maybe it's not true, but to my mind she invented the modern novel, and as she went from unsuccessful works in the epistolary form to extremely successful works in the modern form, via some wrong turns—*Northanger Abbey* is similar to *Lady Susan* in that you wouldn't put it in the canon—but it's her work towards getting there. These two books are leading to the great books, but the material in the *Lady Susan* novella is extremely rich and interesting and smart, it's just that in that form you can't really get at it.

**PC:** When you were making your first films in the 1990s it was really a boom time for Austen adaptations. Were you looking at any of those projects with envy?

**WS:** Actually I had conversations [with some of the producers] about those projects. On some I was their first or second stop [to direct], but at the time I was working on original stories and I felt that to take a great Jane Austen, there are a lot of filmmakers who could do it really well. Also, if you adore Jane Austen, you don't necessarily want to reduce something you love to a 90-minute film.

What was encouraging about *Lady Susan* was that it's really great material, but it wasn't in an accessible format, so you could bring something to the film shelf of Jane Austen adaptations that wouldn't be there normally. I don't think there's any writer who could exist who I could feel closer to, I don't think there's a sentence in Jane Austen that I don't feel close to. With a lot of writers you feel that your agenda is different from them, and I've had adaptation experiences where my view of it was different from the author's and also maybe different from the other producers' views, but in this case I didn't feel that. Yes, now we allow ourselves to do some things that are racier than she would have allowed, but the heart is in the same place and the point of view is in the same place.







**PC:** Did you enjoy immersing yourself in period? You've done period films before, but they were just looking back at the 1980s rather than being a pure period piece like this.

**WS:** This is different because we've never had closed period, in the sense that we've always had living period where we suggest things, but we don't really completely close down streets or film in a studio setting. In *The Last Days of Disco*, when we were doing the street scenes, we put our period cars and vehicles in the foreground, but New York was going on in the background as it is.

Sometimes there are period films with really good production crews and a lot of money, and the result looks like a formaldehyde museum exhibit of somebody's idea of 1957. Often an error is made where all the objects in the film are from that year, when in fact things move much more slowly: you might have one thing from the past three years and everything else will be from decades before. Sometimes you feel that they're going schematically with a big budget without really thinking about it, not that I believe in *cinéma vérité* or reality or anything.

**PC:** Lady Susan Vernon is a perfect role for Kate Beckinsale. I assume she was in your mind from the start.

**WS:** Yes, she was. It took us a long time to finally close that deal for various reasons. In a process of this kind, there are critical and exciting moments. One exciting moment is when you meet the right casting directors. I met three here in London in June 2013, and it was great, they were terrific people, really enthusiastic about the material and had great ideas, but there was one guy who said the right person for this is Kate – that was Colin Jones. He did a great job, and he also helped me on *The Cosmopolitans*, the Amazon pilot. It was actually a very good thing to have that intervening smaller project because I got to work with Chloë [Sevigny] on that, so I could talk to her about [her role in] this. Emma Greenwell, who plays Catherine Vernon, hasn't been talked about a lot yet, but she is very important in the story because she is virtue; she is the boy [with his finger] in the dyke and her mother, Lady Susan, is the flood. She came in to be considered for *The Cosmopolitans* and we had her read for Catherine.

**PC:** You have a great ensemble cast in *Love & Friendship* but the consensus after our screening was that Tom Bennett [as the likeable but not very bright suitor Sir James Martin] steals the movie. What is your casting process? Did you know you'd struck gold as soon as he auditioned?

**WS:** See, that's it. People say, "How do you direct the actors?" and that is happening so far before you get to

the set. It's happening when you're putting the script together, and it's mostly happening in the auditioning process. What I find really remarkable is that there are so many good actors, but really there's one person who's the right magical person for each part – it's really like magic. Now a lot of things are being cast without reading, and that's frightening. You know, James Fleet comes in and reads Sir Reginald, and it's just fantastic, and then Xavier Samuel comes in and reads Reginald Decourcy when no actors were working at all for the part, and it was really great. Justin Edwards came very late, but was so great. With Tom Bennett, it's sensational what he does in the film, and a lot of that is him, in the sense that he created this character and once he had created the character, I wanted to write more scenes for him.

**PC:** Your career began with three films drawn from your own milieu and experiences. When you made *The Last Days of Disco*, was that intended as the closing of a trilogy? Did you have other stories ready to be told?

**WS:** Yeah, it was. I felt there were three things in my life that I thought, "OK, this could be a film," and after that I didn't really have anything. For various reasons I moved to Paris in '98 and I took a little hiatus because I wrote this novel, quite a long novel, based on the screenplay to *The Last Days of Disco*, sort of extrapolating from that, but it took much longer than it should have. It was a really exciting project and creatively it worked out, and it was published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in 2000, but it didn't really have any success until it was republished in France in 2014 and it got a great reaction and a prize and things like that. It was just too hard a sell to come out two years after a film with this novelisation. It did get good reviews, but they tended to be relegated by the book editors to the 'novels in brief' kind of thing, and that's not going to have any impact really. That was a great experience, but it put me behind schedule on other projects, and there was this one thing where Oliver Stone took over a project and then dropped it. That was a bit sad.

**PC:** That was *Red Azalea*, the adaptation of Anchee Min's memoir of life under Mao?

**WS:** Yeah. It was hard to figure out what happened. I was somewhat to blame because I had taken too long on the novel. I was behind schedule, and I hadn't figured out a way to adapt it well, and there was just one thing after another. I was trying to produce here and live in Paris and come over on the Eurostar for appointments, and it was very good in terms of

**WHIT AND WISDOM**  
Whit Stillman (opposite) spent many years writing the screenplay for *Love & Friendship* (above), his adaptation of Jane Austen's *Lady Susan*, after first recognising its filmic potential in the early 2000s



## HIGH SOCIETY

The work of Jane Austen has influenced all of Whit Stillman's creations to date, including (below, from left) *Metropolitan* (1989), *Barcelona* (1994) and *Damsels in Distress* (2011)

getting support for scripts, there were a number of things that went ahead at a script level, but in the industry here I was never able to go from script to production. I became too much a normal screenwriter member of the industry and not an indie filmmaker who was going to make his film at all costs, and you have to have that attitude.

The indie film industry had that deceptive phase when it seemed like there was a lot more money in it and it was a lot more commercial and a lot more part of the industry, but at the same time it was sort of killing the small stuff. I found it inspiring when I started reading about mumblecore and what those filmmakers were doing, and it's not that I've seen many of their films, but when I catch them now I tend to really like them. They're really nice, tiny comedies. When I got the chance to do *Damsels in Distress*, it was my friends at Castle Rock Entertainment backing that and I promised to do it as a super-low-budget thing that they would finance individually with cheques. I was able to use the production infrastructure, such as it was, for mumblecore, but with a little better budget and some more solid organisation, and that's how *Damsels* got off the ground, but I had all these other projects that didn't come through.

At the same time, I've always believed in trunk items, ideas you have that you carry around; it becomes autobiographical because you've been with the project for so long. *Love & Friendship* was the one I didn't commit to any studio or other film company. I wanted to do something at my own pace, and that was a really great decision because there was no time pressure. I could work on it and get it into good shape and then show it to people. My elder daughter loved it, it was a good read, but I knew it wasn't a film yet, and I would put it away to work on something else and then come back to it. There was one period when there was a lot of enthusiasm for it, but I saw it wasn't right yet so I put it away again to come back to later. It takes a long time for the screenwriter to see through his own work.

**PC:** You're associated with that golden era of independent film in the 90s, when so many fresh, distinctive voices suddenly started breaking through. Did you feel like you were part of a movement then?

**WS:** There is a creative golden age normally before there is a commercial boom, so I think the creative golden age was the 80s. That's where the filmmakers influenced me. For us, the big bang – or the penny bang, which seems more appropriate for indie films – was John Sayles's *Return of the Secaucus Seven* [1980]. Here's this other guy who was a short-story writer making a film that people were actually going to see in movie theatres, so we were all flailing around as short-story writers who wanted to make films, wondering how we were going to do our

stories. Then Jim Jarmusch, with *Stranger Than Paradise* [1984], said that you can have incredibly limited resources, absolutely minimalist, and do something that's incredibly beautiful aesthetically and humorously; and then Spike Lee did something else with *She's Gotta Have It* [1986] – a portmanteau, funny, full of life. Those are the three key films.

I also should say that the Spanish directors I was working with when I was first trying to get into the film business by selling Fernando Colomo and Fernando Trueba's films, they had got into it very early. This one guy, Alberto Bermejo, had done a film called *Neighbours* [*Vecinos*, 1981] that I really liked and he said its cash budget was \$50,000, and I knew where I could get \$50,000 for *Metropolitan*. We started working in '88, we shot it in '89, it finally came out at Sundance in January 1990, but the whole boom, bubble, bust cycle of indie already wasn't so good at that time. It was already, "If you're spending that much, you've got to get a name star. Why don't you consider this person and that person? Don't just use the people you used in your other film," and all that kind of thinking gets into it. It got to be so if I saw a film had five big stars in it, I almost wouldn't want to go and see it, because that meant there's a script that's so mediocre he needed five names before he could go ahead with it.

**PC:** Because you can already see the compromise?

**WS:** There was a period when I was reading scripts and getting semi-proposed scripts, and they were so bad and they kept getting made, while I was sure that there were really good projects not getting made. It seems like an effective producer with a mediocre script, that film's going to get made, but a good script with ineffective people behind it is not going to get made. I was talking to this really good comic actress who was shooting this really flawed script that had been around forever, and I asked her what she was going to do next, and she mentioned the next two projects and they were both these really bad scripts that had been knocking around for ages. They think, "Now that this actress is available and popular we can get all these scripts made." She did raise them up from where they were, and you shouldn't be too theological about it because there are things that are bad for a long time, and then they get good.

**PC:** You've said in the past that you don't enjoy the process of filmmaking.

**WS:** No. How could you?

**PC:** Hasn't it got any better or easier over time?

**WS:** I always thought the editing part was pretty good, but then I once had an experience of not getting along with an editor, and that was pretty hellish. This one was pretty good, because I had a producer who was really carrying the weight and an incredibly good crew, in a different way.

*If I saw a film had five big stars in it, I almost wouldn't want to go and see it, because that meant there's a script that's so mediocre he needed five names before he could go ahead with it*





Sarah Edwards, the costume designer on *The Last Days of Disco*, has had a wonderful career, but she had a really tough job on that film: she was very young and I had very precise ideas about how I wanted it to look, because I had been there in that period. Eimer [Ní Mhaoldomhnaigh], who did the costumes in *Love & Friendship* and is getting a lot of credit for it, has a whole world of knowledge and expertise that I don't have, so it's really a relief. That's Eimer's world, and I could look at it and like some things, and that was really true in so many departments; this person is an expert in that department so I could kind of react to things, but it's not a weight on my shoulders. If we're doing these things where it's precisely recreating things I know all about and they're just professionals trying to recreate something, it's hard, so this film was pretty happy.

**PC:** Do you ever look back on your work and get a fresh perspective on what you've done?

**WS:** I just screened *Metropolitan* twice in the past week: once at Emory University in Atlanta and once at Ohio State University in Columbus. I watched the end of the film because I had to be there before the Q&A starts and... oh, it reminds me of the awkwardness. I'm really happy with how it worked out, but I remember for instance there's this last scene where they break in and the girls are all sunbathing in bikinis, and I remember how terrible that scene looked in editing for the longest time, until the editor found a little smile that Carolyn Farina had cleverly thought to throw Tom Townsend's way.

Very often the editor – and usually it's the editor spotting it – spots key actor moments, things the actors thought of doing, which really helps the scenes. When they're outside on the beach in the cold, Carolyn also just adjusted the collar of Tom Townsend, which I think is the only touching moment in the film except for the dancing. We had this Irish setter who also burst into the scene and did a great cameo, and we also got the Atlantic Ocean. The ocean in the daytime is one of my favourite subjects, because it almost always looks really great and really interesting, and it doesn't take direction. You don't have to say anything to it, it just has to do its thing, so I try to have ocean actors who are just going to do their thing.

**PC:** A lot of independent filmmakers are now moving to online studios like Amazon and Netflix. You recently shot the pilot for *The Cosmopolitans* with Amazon. How was that experience?

**WS:** It was great. It's funny, because the way they promote them now, they say, "Oh they give people all this freedom and it's such a relief it's just freedom, freedom, freedom." It was a great experience, but freedom? They were on top of absolutely everything. *Everything* is a conversation. It turned out to be great, but I'd never had any experience like that before, and it was wholly different from making a film. For me it was much better than my other experiences with TV companies, where I never got beyond the script. These TV companies have all this money to commission people to write scripts and you often feel they don't read them once they're turned in, I sincerely think that's true.

I remember once there was a writers' strike coming up and I had to change my idea completely, and there was only six weeks left before they wanted it handed in. I said I couldn't possibly write anything decent in six weeks,



*The ocean in the daytime almost always looks great. You don't have to say anything to it, it just has to do its thing, so I try to have ocean actors who are just going to do their thing*

and they said, "We don't care, just get it in." It was because they were getting paid by the network and there was a writers' strike coming up, and I'm fairly sure they never read that script. So with Amazon it was really great as far as working on the script goes, but they were there on set too, they came to visit while we were shooting in Paris, and it was really good because there was stuff I wanted to change or add and I could just say, "I want to do this," and keep them informed. They said things like, "Can't we do more with Chloë [Sevigny]? Can't Chloë do something else?" And I did have half a scene in mind with Chloë so I was able to write it at 4am and shoot it that day. It was this really cool dialogue scene Chloë has about the Civil War with this Southern character, and it's my favourite scene in the pilot.

**PC:** I have to ask about your only other TV credit too, which is for a single episode of *Homicide: Life on the Street* in 1996. This is such an odd outlier in your career.

**WS:** Well, I think it's the most Whit Stillman of the *Homicides*.

**PC:** I haven't seen all of them, but I'll take your word for that.

**WS:** I got Chris Eigeman, I also got Rosanna Arquette to do the first TV show she'd done. It was a very good script by Henry Bromell and then they added these melodramatic incidents that weren't as good as the original script. I don't know. It was pretty good, don't you think?

**PC:** Yeah, I thought it was fine. I'm just curious as to why you only made this one foray into episodic TV.

**WS:** Because I think I got blackballed. You can't really have an opinion if you're a TV director, you just have to execute the script, and I really liked the script I was given, but then the rewrite made it too melodramatic and the two white guys were made such horrible villains. It made no sense to me, it was absolutely nonsensical that just to have some villains they turned these guys into bastards. One of them was the yuppie character that Chris Eigeman was playing, so I felt that this was one of my characters who we're not treating unfairly, we're not stereotyping, we're not maligning, and suddenly he was just moronic. It was too bad. I would have loved to do more, but all those shows are connected and I just caused trouble. ☹

**DANCING QUEENS**  
Kate Beckinsale and Chloë Sevigny in *The Last Days of Disco* (above), the last in a loosely autobiographical trilogy of films Whit Stillman directed in the 1990s



**Love & Friendship** is released in UK cinemas on 27 May and is reviewed on page 83





# TEAM AMERICA





**FRAT CITY**  
*Everybody Wants Some!!*  
(opposite) follows freshmen members of the baseball team during their first weekend at college in 1980, presenting a vision of student life familiar from films such as *Animal House* (1978, above)

*Richard Linklater's 'Everybody Wants Some!!', a snapshot of life at a Texas university in the 1980s, offers an enjoyable mix of youth, beer, lust and sport, the hallmarks of a genre of American movies that goes all the way back to Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton*

**By Nick Pinkerton**

**Richard Linklater's latest film, *Everybody Wants Some!!***, begins at the point where his last film, *Boyhood* (2014), ends – the movie's central character arrives on his college campus for the first time and sets out to take the measure of his surroundings, the environment in which he will begin becoming whatever it is that he will be. *Boyhood*'s Mason (Ellar Coltrane), having turned down close-to-home University of Texas, winds up at Sul Ross State University in the far west of the state, and as the film closes he's just accepted the first of many pot brownies to come, and is staring out over Chihuahuan Desert and the possibilities ahead. In *Everybody Wants Some!!*, Jake (Blake Jenner), a freshman pitcher on the nationally ranked baseball team at Southeast Texas University – based on Sam Houston State University in Texas, where Linklater played baseball as a freshman – arrives and immediately sets about trying on the different identities that are available: urban cowboy, disco dude, punk rocker, theatre school exhibitionist.

Totals vary, but as nearly as anybody can tell there are around 3,000 four-year universities in the United States. But despite the fact that the American university experience is a nationally and, increasingly, internationally recognisable part of coming of age, it has been somewhat underserved in American movies. This is particularly true of the kind of second-tier state school experience that Linklater details, which is more familiar to most Americans than, say, the description of Amory Blaine in F. Scott Fitzgerald's debut *This Side of Paradise* (1920), stretched out on the lawn at Princeton of a damp May evening admiring the Gothic spires, or the Harvard campus and Henley Royal Regatta material in David Fincher's *The Social Network* (2010). I confess that I respond to what Linklater has done quite strongly, having spent most of my collegiate experience at a public research university outside Dayton, Ohio, whose most notable alumni include Guided by Voices' Bob Pollard, and Jim Van Bebber, the writer, director, star and stunt coordinator of *Deadbeat at Dawn* (1987). The campus had all the picturesque, ivy-wreathed charm of your average 70s corporate park, but you got big ideas for puny tuition fees, and I look back on my time there with misty fondness. This omission of the lower ranks of higher education is hardly uniquely American: for France's Emmanuel Bourdieu, who with his screenplay credit on Arnaud Desplechin's *Ma vie sexuelle* (1996) and second feature as director *Poison Friends* (*Les Amitiés malefiques*, 2006) is something like the dean of films on French





**PLAYING THE FIELD**  
(Clockwise from top) Harold Lloyd in *The Freshman* (1925), Pat O'Brien and Ronald Reagan in *Knute Rockne – All American* (1940), and Jerry Lewis and Eddie Mayehoff in *That's My Boy* (1951)



academia, it's the Sorbonne or nothing, while it took *The Young Ones* of Scumbag College to break from the English romance with the 'ancient universities' that long precedes Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) and Max Beerbohm's *Zuleika Dobson* (1911).

On the face of things *Everybody Wants Some!!* might make a case for being included in one well-established subgenre, the college sports movie. As in the popularity of American collegiate sports, there is a definite hierarchy here. While the little and major leagues are well represented on the screen, this is the only college baseball film I know of. College hoops fare a little better in representation, with William Friedkin's *Blue Chips* (1994) something like the masterpiece of the genre, though there's plenty of headroom between this accomplishment and being an actually great film. Pride of place certainly goes to the game that first entered the popular imagination as a college pastime, American football. According to a 2010 piece in the *Journal of Popular Culture*, "College football is featured in eighty-nine of [the 115 college sports films] released from 1926 to 1941," and the spigot is still running. Gridiron tearjerkers abound in the present day, among them *We Are Marshall* (2006) and *Rudy* (1993), though the quintessential text must be *Knute Rockne – All American* (1940), a biopic of the star University of Notre Dame coach who, in his playing days with the team, helped popularise the forward pass during a storied 1913 game against Army. (The event is also dramatised in John Ford's 1954 *The Long Gray Line*.)

The most recognisable scene of American college football appears in *The Freshman* (1925), in which Harold Lloyd's incoming member of the Tate University student body is put in the last quarter of the Big Game after every other substitution has been mauled, then forces a fumble and jukes his way through approximately 75 defenders to score a game-winning touchdown, all while suffering from what appears to be a severe concussion. (The perennial-benchwarmer-turned-hero is a cherished cliché, ratcheted to overkill in the 1998 Adam Sandler comedy *The Waterboy*, set at fictional South Central Louisiana State University.) The early popular image of the American college slickster, with the raccoon coat and the university pennant and the Stutz Bearcat with the rumble seat, is a figure who comes to us from the late 1910s and 20s, when higher education was still a rather exclusive experience. He was a figure ripe for the mocking, and so we have *The Freshman*; Buster Keaton's *College* (1927), in which Buster plays a bookworm who takes the position of coxswain on the Clayton College rowing team in order to impress Anne Cornwall; and the Marx Brothers' *Horse Feathers* (1932), which features a touchdown drive in a chariot. In *College*, valedictorian Buster gives a speech on the 'Curse of athletics' at his high-school graduation, but judging from these films book-learning is of only incidental importance in the collegiate experience, for study has never been regarded as nearly so cinematic as sport.

The college boy was slightly less visible in Hollywood films produced through the early years of the Great Depression, with new competition from other compelling narratives – in William Wellman's *Wild Boys of the Road* (1933), Frankie Darro and Edwin Phillips are the archetypal all-American freshmen-to-be, but circumstances force them to drop out of high school and start riding the rails to take the strain off their families. By the end

BET NATIONAL ARCHIVE (3) KOBAL COLLECTION (2) PHOTOEST NYC (1)



of the decade there was a small comeback in the form of films such as *College Swing* (1938) and turn-of-the-last-century nostalgia piece *Those Were the Days!* (1940), but then before you know it there was a war on and the varsity lettermen and bobby-soxers were off getting shot at in Sicily and running Red Cross hospitals. During the post-war return to normalcy, with its unprecedented material comfort, youth-centred movies tended to focus on the figure of the teenager and, particularly, the juvenile delinquent, though comedians still found themselves being enrolled, as in the Martin and Lewis comedy *That's My Boy* (1951), in which Jerry is the weakling offspring of all-American football great 'Jarring Jack' Jackson. One film of the period sufficiently idiosyncratic to merit mention is Phil Karlson's *5 Against the House* (1955), which features Guy Madison and post-traumatic stress disorder case Brian Keith as two Korean War veterans attending 'Midwestern University' who get caught up in a heist at a Reno casino – call it the collegiate crime caper film, which would resurface in Harmony Korine's churlish and raffishly half-assed *Spring Breakers* (2012).

The image of spring break in popular culture was crystallised by Henry Levin's Metrocolor romp *Where the Boys Are* (1960) – a college movie defined by the absence of college, which would prompt both immediate imitators (*Palm Springs Weekend*, 1963) and distant relations (*The Real Cancun*, 2003; the *Girls Gone Wild* oeuvre.) The particular quality of American campus life in the years before the emergence of a counterculture *per se* is perhaps best conveyed in Richard Fariña's 1966 cult novel *Been Down So Long It Looks Like up to Me* – made into a disdained Paramount production in 1971 – which details the misadventures of iconoclast Gnosso Pappadopoulos on the campus of 'Mentor University', a fictional version of Cornell. "You have to appreciate the extent of sexual repression on that campus at that time," Fariña's former classmate Thomas Pynchon writes in the introduction to my paperback edition of the novel. "Rock 'n' roll had been with us for a few years, but the formulation Dope/Sex/Rock 'n' Roll hadn't yet been made by too many of us."

#### ANIMAL INSTINCTS

The movie that, more than any other, is associated with film depictions of university life is also set on an early 60s campus where that formulation was being hammered out: former Zeta Beta Tau fraternity member Harold Ramis's *Animal House* (1978). Without *Animal House* it is impossible to imagine these many spiritual sequels – *Revenge of the Nerds* (1984), *PCU* (1994), *National Lampoon's Van Wilder* (2001) – a statement which is absolutely meant to come off as ambivalent. (It was also directly responsible for the *Mad* magazine-produced, Robert Downey Sr.-directed *Up the Academy* in 1980, which belongs to a parallel 'military academy' subgenre that goes back to at least 1957 with Jack Garfein's *The Strange One*, in which young Ben Gazzara played dormitory sociopath Jocko De Paris.) These days the frat boy is generally treated in popular culture with the same disdain as the red-blooded thick-necked 'bro', but as the music historian Peter Guralnick has pointed out, the south-eastern fraternity circuit of the late 50s and early 60s had elements which were (perhaps only incidentally) progressive, providing an important source of revenue and practice for southern black soul acts, as signified by the presence



of DeWayne Jessie's R&B performer Otis Day in *Animal House*. (As an undergraduate at New Orleans's Tulane University, the future documentarian Les Blank was a Sigma Chi Fraternity pledge, and the experience seems to have gone some way towards shaping his signature *joie de vivre*.)

Aside from *Van Wilder* and administration-framing films which referred to the Yalie frat-boy background of President George W. Bush either implicitly (*The Skulls*, 2000) or explicitly (*W*, 2008), the 21st century's most significant contribution to frat cinema was *Old School* (2002), produced by Ivan Reitman, who'd held the same job on *Animal House*. Director Todd Phillips was to that point best known for a trio of films: scurrilous college comedy *Road Trip* (2000); *Frat House* (1998), an HBO documentary exposé shot at various frat chapters at Muhlenberg College and the State University of New York College at Oneonta during the golden age of butt chugging; and *Hated: GG Allin & the Murder Junkies* (1993), a portrait of a punk celebrity famous for writing tuneful power pop and shitting himself on stage. A specialist in men behaving badly, *Old School*, a downbeat comedy of midlife male menopause, is premised on what happens when three old college buddies (Will Ferrell, Luke Wilson, Vince Vaughn) try to relive their glory days by setting up a frat hideaway on the fringes of an upstate New York campus.

*'Old School' is a downbeat comedy premised on what happens when three old college buddies set up a frat hideaway on the fringes of an upstate New York campus*

**MEN BEHAVING BADLY** Rodney Dangerfield in *Back to School* (1986, top), and the 21st century's most significant contribution to frat cinema *Old School* (2002, above), starring Will Ferrell, Luke Wilson and Vince Vaughn




Old School wasn't the first 'continuing education' comedy to milk yuks from unleashing oldsters on to a campus. *High Time* (1960), an undeservedly obscure Blake Edwards comedy about a 51-year-old widower and owner of a chain of steakhouses who decides to take his bachelor's degree at a southern university, stars Bing Crosby opposite a cast of contemporary teen idols including Fabian and Tuesday Weld, and to my knowledge is unique in structuring itself around the entire four-year educational process, scrupulously matching each year to a change of season. *Back to School* (1986), which borrows the premise of *High Time* to provide a vehicle for the middle-aged, pop-eyed comedian Rodney Dangerfield, lacks the structural ingenuity and visual *élan* of Edwards's film, but it does feature some sterling one-liners (to a co-ed English major in a hot tub: "Maybe you can help me straighten out my Longfellow") and a weird cameo by Kurt Vonnegut Jr, only bettered by Gore Vidal's meaty role in hobo-on-campus oddity *With Honors* (1994).

The collegian of pictures was, typically, as male and white as the driven snow, though, beginning with Spike Lee's *School Daze* (1988), there was a small surge in films dealing in the experience of the HBCUs (historically black colleges and universities), carrying through titles such as John Singleton's *Higher Learning* (1995) and Charles Stone III's dynamo competitive marching band opus *Drumline* (2002). (Justin Simien's 2014 *Dear White People*, by contrast, looks at the black student at a historically white Ivy League.) As for the female scholar, *Where the Boys Are* sums up the motives classically attributed to the co-ed, usually regarded as diddling around with book-learning while on the make for a mate. The pickings are slim, from John Farrow's *Sorority House* (1939) to the brutally uplifting Julia Roberts Wellesley College period piece *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003), but a few films have seriously considered the female collegiate experience,

most recently Whit Stillman's *Damsels in Distress* (2011), which strikes a fine philosophical balance between Dionysian and Apollonian tendencies.

Distressed damsels are also key to another female-centric campus-based subgenre, the sorority house slasher, for all practical purposes invented by Bob Clark's *Black Christmas* (1974). With its high concentration of nubile flesh and rampant promiscuity, the campus is a natural scene for these Eros-and-Thanatos productions, and so *Black Christmas* begat *Hell Night* (1981), *The House on Sorority Row* (1983) and *Sorority House Massacre* (1987) in turn. Art to some extent imitated life: serial killer Ted Bundy was undone when he left behind a tell-tale bite mark during a 1978 rampage at the Chi Omega sorority house at Florida State University. (He later blamed his outbursts on an addiction to pornography, another genre which to this day frequently uses the dorm room as a stock setting.)

The campus on screen has served as a microcosm of American society, a stage for athletic heroism, a non-stop erotic cabaret and a slasher's stabbing gallery – it has been just about everything, in fact, except a place where one sits in a classroom and takes notes from a lecturer, an experience which has rarely been central to an American movie in the years since *The Paper Chase* (1973), though Frederick Wiseman's *At Berkeley* (2013) does include some hot lecture-hall material, and Linklater included University of Texas philosophy lecturer Robert Solomon among the collage of voices in his *Waking Life* (2001). In *Everybody Wants Some!!*, the classroom finally appears as a place to crash after a long weekend of hell-bent-for-leather raging, and the scholastic experience remains the last frontier of collegiate cinema – maybe Linklater can get past registration. 



**Everybody Wants Some!!** is released in UK cinemas on 13 May and is reviewed on page 60

*The campus on screen has served as a microcosm of American society, a stage for athletic heroism, a non-stop erotic cabaret and a slasher's stabbing gallery*

**HIGHER LEARNING**  
(Clockwise from top left) Justin Simien's *Dear White People* (2014), Spike Lee's *School Daze* (1988), Mike Newell's *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) and Henry Levin's *Where the Boys Are* (1960)

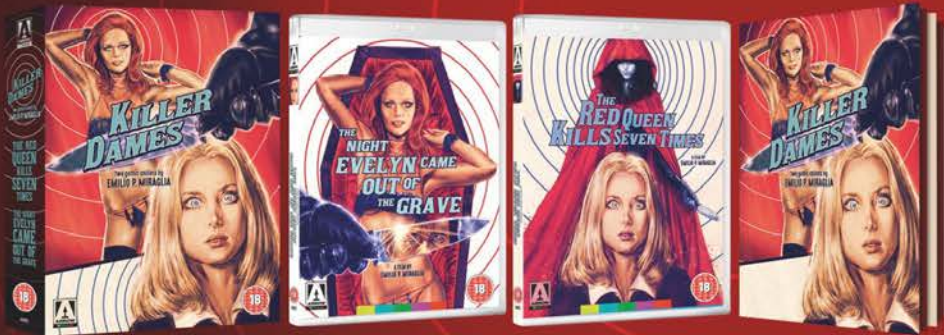


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# WILD AT HEART

Deniz Gamze Ergüven's smart modern fairytale 'Mustang' offers a stern critique of the strictures of conservative Turkish society, in a tale of five free-spirited sisters in a remote village who rebel against the narrow horizons their lives have offered them

By Despina Ladi

When the 37-year-old Turkish-French director Deniz Gamze Ergüven was shooting *Mustang* in a remote Black Sea village, trying to stay under the radar to avoid opposition from the local authorities, little did she imagine that her film would eventually be nominated for the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar. Inspired by her teenage years in Turkey and stories her cousins shared with her – and co-written with *Disorder* director Alice Winocour – *Mustang* is a bitter-sweet coming-of-age story about five orphaned sisters being raised by their conservative grandmother and oppressive uncle. Their lives change dramatically after an innocent seaside game with some male classmates is perceived as indecent.

Their grandmother beats them, calling them disgusting for “rubbing” themselves against the necks of the boys, and their uncle takes them to the doctor to make sure their virginity is intact. Soon, marriages are being arranged and their house becomes a prison – a “wife factory”, as Lale, the youngest sister, calls it. Their uncle and grandmother try to break their unity and spirit in every way they can: they’re banned from school and forced to take ‘classes’ from their aunts in domestic skills; items that could corrupt them – make-up and mobile phones

– are taken away from them. But as they suffer this brutal transition, and seek different ways of trying to escape, we witness just how feisty and self-reliant they have become.

*Mustang* owes much of its energy to its five remarkable leads – Günes Sensoy as Lale, Doga Zeynep Doguslu as Nur, Tugba Sunguroglu as Selma, Elit Iscan as Ece and Ilayda Akdogan as Sonay – only one of whom had any acting experience. And if they steal the show, the presence of the grandmother (played by Nihal G. Koldas) is also crucial, showing us another aspect of what it means to be a woman in Turkey: trapped in a role patriarchal society has forced on her, she is torn between having to obey the man of the house (in this case her son) and protecting her granddaughters from his violent outbursts.

While many have compared *Mustang* to Sofia Coppola's *The Virgin Suicides* (1999), Ergüven says her references were *Escape from Alcatraz* (1979), Chekhov's *The Three Sisters* and Greek mythology. Her intention was to adopt a fable-like style, to portray the girls as a five-headed creature, and the film often feels like a modern fairytale in which the girls – as untameable as the wild horses of the American West that give the film its title – must grab the reins of their lives and become the heroines of their own story.

Since *Mustang* is an exploration of what it means to be a woman in a country where family traditions and the role of men are not to be questioned, the film has inevitably stirred Turkey's conservative waters, provoking a mixed response: most film critics supported it, but some people accused it of depicting a false image of the country. France decided to ‘adopt’ *Mustang* as a French film and submit it to the Oscars. For Ergüven, who considers herself Turkish first and then French, this has been a touching expression of France's intention to embrace diversity.





#### SISTER ACT

While many have compared *Mustang* (above, below) to Sofia Coppola's *The Virgin Suicides*, director Deniz Gamze Ergüven (above right) says her references were *Escape from Alcatraz* and Greek mythology

*People don't think I'm going to kick their ass. I do when I need to, and I'm strong when I need to be, but it's not written on my forehead*



**Despina Ladi:** Five years ago you were at the Cinéfondation workshop for young filmmakers at Cannes, struggling to develop *Kings*, a script about the Los Angeles riots. Then your classmate Alice Winocour motivated you to write about something you know, so *Mustang* came about. Is it easier to talk about something closer to you?

**Deniz Gamze Ergüven:** *Kings* was extremely close to me, but I had a hard time explaining it to people because I hadn't lived that story. *Mustang* was a deliberate choice of me saying, "OK, I'm not going to freak people out anymore. I'm going to do something with girls who look like me and speak like me and everyone will easily understand it." *Kings* was based on historical events, so I had to read everything, go through archives and meet people, then write the film. With *Mustang* that work was already done. The material was already 'mine'. The structure was worked out before I even started to write.

**DL:** As a child, your idea of Turkey was formed by going there for the summer holidays and discussions you had with your relatives. Did that distance from the subject help?

**DGE:** Definitely. Being able to zoom in and out of the experience and also knowing how it was to be a woman in other places, was constitutive to the way I articulated the question in the film.

**DL:** How did your Turkish experience and heritage affect you while growing up?

**DGE:** That's a difficult question. Maybe I am slightly more conservative than my European friends. Just that.

**DL:** Is the situation *Mustang* describes representative of what it means to grow up as a girl in rural Turkey?

**DGE:** The situations that are the basis of each scene are real. They are either things I've lived or seen around me or documented, and the way the girls react is the place where fiction enters. For example, the little scandal the girls trigger at the beginning of the film is something we lived in our family. The prevalent feeling was shame, so even if we felt injustice we didn't say anything. When the girls later start breaking the chairs in the yard saying, "These chairs were touched by our asses," that's where fiction enters.

And then it's a film told as a fairytale and it's quite condensed. Nobody can say it is the exact life of this person. There are reflections with real-life characters and a lot of real events, but it's fragmentary. Being emotionally truthful is very important to me. The chairs incident shows what the girls feel, their desire to revolt.

**DL:** Has the film helped trigger any positive discussions around the issues it raises?

**DGE:** When the film came out, reactions were polarised. There were people who, when they didn't like the film, would either attack me by saying, "She's not Turkish," or the film by saying, "The script is so bad, the actresses are so bad, it's so boring." You would look at the page of the person on social media and it said 'AK party' [the ruling,



socially conservative Justice and Development Party]. I didn't have the impression that discussions about the film were always honest intellectually. But there's been a lot of press and people say, "It's a gloomy time in Turkey and this is good news." It makes them happy, so it's good.

Anyone who doesn't agree with the current government is called a terrorist. For us, it's the same, albeit at a smaller scale. Our legitimacy is questioned. In a way, the film's success and the Oscar nomination shut the mouths of everyone who attacked it.

**DL:** Hopefully younger audiences will see it, at least.

**DGE:** The actresses who play the girls have accompanied the film a lot. It was surprising that they see the values of the film as normal, whereas some things said in it are socially not so acceptable. For them, being courageous, fighting for your rights, being a bit insular when you need to be—all those things—have become normal. They become more and more like the characters.

**DL:** Can cinema help change the way women are perceived?

**DGE:** It's not a question of equity, it's much bigger than that. When you look at the world through the eyes of women, cinema is an extremely powerful meta-language. We can say things through film we can't say any other way—exchange experiences and points of view, and generate compassion, empathy, knowledge and perspective. In cultures where women are in a very different position, it objectifies them and for some men generates a complete inability to project themselves into the mind of a woman. But even people who hate the film, who feel antagonised by it, even they, for an hour and a half, have seen the world through Lale's eyes. That is quite a leap. Just that exercise is such a little revolution of perspective and potentially it can trigger that little breach.

A film is like a little military column and the director is the leader. There is something animal about not trusting a girl who at face value doesn't generate the energy of a dominant alpha male. A few weeks ago in the US we were sitting with my fellow directors from the Oscars shortlist. The guys were all sitting with their legs spread and their arms on the sofa and spoke with deep and manly voices. I was the only one sitting straight, with my knees touching each other, having a low, soft voice.

People don't think I'm going to kick their ass. I do when I need to, and I'm strong when I need to be, but it's not written on my forehead. It's animal. Three weeks before the shoot I was dumped by *Mustang's* [original] woman producer. She knew that I had just discovered I was pregnant. It's like me, when I see a woman pilot, I'm ashamed for myself. We are just a product of our time. There is progress; eventually we are going to go somewhere. 🍷



**Mustang is released in UK cinemas on 13 May and is reviewed on page 84**





**MYSTERIES OF THE DEEP**  
Like *Innocence* (2004), the previous film from French director Lucile Hadzihalilovic (left), *Evolution* (opposite) is a work of marvellous, affecting strangeness

Set in a remote village by the sea, Lucile Hadzihalilovic's surreal horror fantasy 'Evolution' is an enigmatic coming-of-age tale about a boy who tries to find out the truth behind the mysterious treatments taking place in the local hospital

By Nick Bradshaw

# THE LOST BOYS

Opening in a sparsely soundtracked underwater landscape, with languorous shots immersing us in an eddying primordial soup of light and unidentified life, Lucile Hadzihalilovic's *Evolution* surfaces like an Edgar Rice Burroughs fantasy into a community of waterside dwellers. There is something Amazonian about it, defined by slender young mothers each attached to a single prepubescent boy; the mothers are dressed in minimalist beige slips, hair back, eyebrows plucked; the boys are in trunks – our hero Nicolas (Max Brebant) stands out in red, his mother (Julie-Marie Parmentier) remains discreet. The ground is black volcanic sand; out of it rises a village of cuboid white houses. (The movie was shot in Lanzarote.)

Nicolas is fed on a gruel that looks like worm stew (Brits may ponder an austerity drive masterminded by Roald Dahl's *The Twits*). A calm, blank unknowability prevails, although Nicolas has his doubts about local appearances, even before he is led, like his peers, to the hospital.

Like Hadzihalilovic's artistic breakthrough *Innocence* (2004), which followed a relay of three young girls in the eerie and ritualistic confines of a single-sex boarding school in the woods through three seasons in their transition to adulthood, *Evolution* is a marvel of highly resonant, non-literalist strangeness. Notes of surrealism, sci-fi, fantasy and body horror are combined into something exquisitely distilled, crystalline in tone yet swirling with ambiguity. Hadzihalilovic likes to cite the influence of the Italian metaphysical artist Giorgio de Chirico, but I'm reminded of the Picasso quote, "Every child is an artist; the problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up": she has mastered a poetics of fear and wonder

that honours the impressionability and naive imagination of children even while, as her open-ended titles suggest, linking our own processes of change to those both microscopic and inter-generational. The question is, not for the first time, why such an evident artist might find it so hard to make her work.

**Nick Bradshaw:** I recall you saying that it had been hard to fund-raise for *Innocence*. Why did it take 11 years to make *Evolution*?

**Lucile Hadzihalilovic:** It took maybe two years to get the money to make *Innocence*. I lost a year with one producer, then switched to the other. But it now seems a quick and easy process compared to *Evolution*. I'm so surprised by many of the reactions to the film – that people are able to understand it or at least get emotionally involved in it – because for years all I heard was: "We don't understand what it is about. Come back with a better script." And maybe there was a part of the film that I didn't understand myself, and I had to make it to know exactly what it was about.

**NB:** There's the Hitchcock way, where you supposedly have it all worked out before you shoot, but usually there's a process of exploration in the shooting and the editing.

**LH:** Maybe the sound is the most mysterious aspect of a film. It adds a dimension that you can't really account for in a script – you can describe things and invent details with sound and make it evocative, and it's where the biggest surprises for me are. As a writer or director you're supposed to know and control everything. For me, it's about building rules: you try to build a playground in which you want to play with the people you're going to make the film with. But it's a difficult

PHOTOGRAPH BY SUZANNE LEE/GETTY IMAGES









**→** notion for people who give money, to admit that they're not able to play with you because they don't have the imagination.

**NB: That they're not artists?**

**LH:** No, I don't want to say that. The audience can be the artist sometimes – it's not some sacred privilege. Other people can be part of the creative process of a film.

**NB: Is it a shooting script that you show producers, or some kind of sales script?**

**LH:** I don't start with a story; it's more images, situations, textures and abstract things like that. But after *Innocence* I didn't want to be too abstract. I wanted to make it more narrative and even based in genre – partly because I thought it would be easier, more understandable; mainly because I wanted to do something a bit different. When I was young, I watched a lot of horror, fantasy and science-fiction films. I love the idea of experiencing fear in the cinema. So that's why I wanted to make what I call a genre film, a kind of horror film.

At some point I needed someone to help me with the script, so I found Alanté [Kavaïté, the writer-director of 2006's *Fissures* and 2015's *The Summer of Sangailé*], who helped me build a story in which these images and feelings and emotions could happen. For many years the [draft of the] film was much richer; it had more elements and maybe more explanation, and was a little less elliptical. But when it became obvious that we weren't going to get the money or time to shoot that film, we really had to cut it back; it became more evocative and elliptical.

**NB: What do you think attracts you to those original feelings and textures you mention?**

**LH:** It's a coming-of-age story, and of course it comes from my own memories and feelings, my fears and desires at that age. It's framed in a narrative way, but it doesn't emerge that way or as something realistic, but rather as the kind of phantasmagoria that I could have at that age.

For instance – I went to the hospital for the first time at the age of ten or 11, with appendicitis. It was the first time in my life I can say I was touched by adults, had my body opened by adults. Even if it was totally normal and common, not dramatic, it was a strong feeling for me, and a moment of changing.

**NB: And do these very isolated metaphorical settings where something strange is afoot come from your upbringing too?**

**LH:** Of course they're metaphorical, but at that stage of life I felt quite distant from adults; they felt quite foreign or alien. And I had quite a protected childhood – not exactly in the countryside, but I didn't move to a big city until after high school – so maybe the films reflect a feeling of being protected as well as isolated in a place of nature, whether it's a seaside or a forest. There are institutions that prepare you for human activity and the adult world, whether it's through the hospital or the school.

A hospital seems an important place, very exciting and scary, the door to another world. My parents are both doctors, so maybe that's another basic connection.

**NB: Did you grow up with brothers?**

**LH:** I had a sister. And it's funny because we had many years' difference – the same gap as between the oldest and the youngest girl in *Innocence*. So it was a bit like we were both single children.

**NB: *Evolution* inverts what might be called classically female fears or expectations about what can happen to the body and enacts them on the bodies of boys.**

**LH:** Yes, if it had been a girl in the story it would have had no interest. It would have been too obvious. The idea was to make it a horror thing. And until the age of 11 or 12 I felt I could be a boy or a girl, so portraying myself as a boy at that age is not so difficult. But of course it's scarier as a boy, because you're not supposed to experience that.

**NB: Did you have to talk to your boy actor, Max Brebant, about the character?**

**LH:** No, not at all. He didn't care about the meaning of the film. He just wanted a fun experience, and swimming in the sea sounded exciting. He only asked me two questions. One was, "Will I have to have injections?" and the other was, "Who's going to play the girl?" I found it funny, but actually he really understood the story – which is about a boy who escapes from his mother to have this experience with a girl. That's the heart of the story, and he saw it very well: there's a kiss and a girl, not at all a monster. He found it fun.

Julie-Marie [Parmentier, who plays the mother], who has a more classical approach to acting, was afraid of playing a bad mother and had more questions – maybe she had played a few characters like that already. I thought it would have been quite an exciting role for an actress to play a kind of human-but-alien mother, but I had to convince Julie-Marie that she wasn't bad, she just wants something that's in her nature... but these adult characters were quite like abstract figures, so perhaps it was good that she was able to bring a bit more humanity or reality to bear, to play it as simply as possible. Anyway, we didn't talk much.

**NB: Were you always going to set it in and out of, or beside, the sea?**

**LH:** No. It seems strange but in the beginning it was only the hospital – a hospital in a city, with nothing outside. Then at some point it seemed obvious I needed to get out, and suddenly, of course, the seaside and the ocean seemed a perfect echo of what was happening inside.

**NB: And there's the dichotomy of above and below the waves.**

**LH:** True, and it's a different way to have an underground – I always have a tendency to have some kind of underground – but now it's not underground, it's underwater,

#### UNDER THE KNIFE

While writing *Evolution* (above), Lucile Hadzihalilovic tapped in to her own memories and fears, including the experience of having surgery for appendicitis as a girl

*When I was young, I watched a lot of horror, fantasy and sci-fi films. I love the idea of experiencing fear in the cinema. That's why I wanted to make a kind of horror film*





so a bit different and very exciting, strange and strong because it's so visual and there are so many things to be seen underwater. It's not just obscurity.

**NB:** The process of making the natural seem strange is right there at your fingertips, with all these sea creatures that are utterly mysterious and mystifying.

**LH:** Even an image as simple as the starfish. We've seen so many images of children playing with starfish at the seaside, but when you really look at it it's such a weird creature. We didn't use all the information we gathered about them, or other creatures, but it became a kind of food for the film.

**NB:** All the time we spend watching the movement of the sea, its light and other shapes we can't quite identify, lends a kind of primordial feeling of what happens to us in species form but also as individuals in our own bodies.

**LH:** At some point the script had a lot more about these kind of elements, and then we had to make it shorter. But visually it works, showing this harder form of life under water, and that it's still there.

**NB:** Did your cinematographer Manuel Dacosse shoot the underwater images?

**LH:** He shot some in a pool, but it would have been too hard for him to manipulate the camera in the sea with an oxygen tank on – there are currents and the camera's very heavy. We worked with an underwater cameraman who knew the surroundings, so he also helped as our location scout. I'm no diver, so it wasn't like I knew any of the scenery! He found us the underwater landscape that provides the second shot of the film, for instance, and he knew when the light would be there and so on.

It wasn't so easy to tell him what we wanted in terms of camerawork, though, because he was more used to documentaries – so for him the clearer the sea was the better, whereas we wanted the opposite, with a lot of organic elements in the water, and we wanted more steady long shots, when he was more used to moving. The difficulty was we didn't have any return feed of the image while he was shooting, for some technical reason... He was very willing and good, but it was sometimes a miracle.

**NB:** And these are digital images?

**LH:** Yes, unfortunately. We tried to put as much texture as possible into them, so it's not too dead an image.

**NB:** It worked really well, because you don't have the grain doing its own swirling, so you just see the swirling of the underwater environment itself.

**LH:** Those for me are the best images. Interiors too are okay, and the night scenes are fine – better, even, in digital, because you have more latitude. But I was very afraid about the exteriors, because the sun was so strong. Manuel and I were not so happy filming it digitally, but we really didn't have a choice. It's funny because the idea with digital is you can see more and better, but they're

not mental images. For me, the images should lend an oneiric feeling, a dream or nightmare or whatever, but not realistic; and it's very hard to fight against that with digital. It's good to have an out-of-focus texture; you can add that a bit digitally, but it's not the same image. And there's not the stroboscopic feeling; that's totally lost.

**NB:** Did you know Lanzarote before you wrote the script?


**LH:** No. I just knew I wanted the sound to be somewhere in the south, and I wasn't sure where I could shoot that; maybe Corsica? And I wasn't sure where I could find the villages. At some point one of the producers suggested we could shoot in the Canary Islands, and that it was a good place to get money. It seemed like the mood was totally the right one. We scouted a few islands and found this village on Lanzarote – in fact there are two villages in the film, one on another island, a bit different. I was sure from the first moment that it was a perfect place to shoot, because it was just so strange and strong with nature, with these volcanic rocks and black sand, the wind of the sea and the sense of isolation. The village is like somewhere you could have been on holiday, but also has a medical mood, because of the white and the cubic shapes. I felt we wouldn't have much to do there to create a different reality. It's very important for me that the locations exist for real, not only in your dream: it's not oneiric or realistic, it's both.

It was more difficult to find the hospital. We needed one that was real, abandoned – obviously – but not totally ruined, where we could paint the walls but not destroy it, because we didn't have the money to rebuild anything. We found this huge one outside Barcelona, which maybe hundreds of Spanish horror films have been shot in. But I hope no Spanish people will recognise it! We painted it green – maybe that makes it a bit different.

**NB:** Did you know the work of the Lanzarotean artist and architect César Manrique?

**LH:** No, because I didn't know the Canary Islands before we went there. I think the village I had in mind came more from de Chirico – his streets and houses, and the colour: there's a realistic element and suddenly you have a building which is red. It's not what we did in the end, but it was an inspiration. Likewise the surrealist painters: Tanguy, Max Ernst, Leonora Carrington. They're not a specific reference, but I'm very familiar with their images, paintings whose universe I find very inspiring.

**NB:** Do you identify as a surrealist filmmaker?

**LH:** It's funny because of course de Chirico is a real surrealist, but I didn't consciously think I was going in that direction. It's about taking from yourself to things. Maybe in ten years I will say, "Oh, it's a surrealist film," but I don't yet have the distance. 

*The images should lend an oneiric feeling, a dream or nightmare or whatever, but not be realistic*



**Evolution** is released in UK cinemas on 6 May and is reviewed on page 71



# BAND ON THE RUN

A punk band falls foul of a gang of psychotic neo-Nazis in Jeremy Saulnier's savvy exploitation thriller 'Green Room', a film which never lets the gleefully lurid mayhem on screen overshadow the bravura craft and finesse of the filmmaking

By Trevor Johnston



**DAFT PUNKS**  
Director Jeremy Saulnier (above) took inspiration from his youth in the hardcore music scene in Washington, for his tale of a band (right) who witness a murder and find themselves at the mercy of a backwoods mob led by Patrick Stewart (below)

Whether it's some venerated Hitchcockian classic or myriad B-grade time-passers, the essence of the thriller genre usually boils down to the same notion: an ordinary individual in extraordinary circumstances, put to the test, facing moral choices which breach accepted codes of behaviour. As the booming trailer voiceover would say: "What would you do? How far would you go... to protect yourself/ your loved ones/ your values/ your way of life? Or in the case of Jeremy Saulnier's *Green Room*, "...to make it alive to the next morning." A cash-strapped punk band taking on a hastily arranged gig in the back of beyond may not seem like the most obvious candidates for everyman status, but they are forced to assume the mantle after witnessing a backstage murder and realising that the far-right activists who run the joint as a funding source will stop at nothing to prevent them from heading off again on their merry way. On one side of the locked green-room door, our unlikely heroes the Aint Rights; on the other, a bunch of neo-Nazi zealots and psychotic backwoods skinheads.

Initially trapped in the scuzzy dressing room, the bandmates, including sensitive bassist Anton Yelchin and ballsy guitarist Alia Shawkat, have pause to regret the goading cover of the Dead Kennedys' 'Nazi Punks Fuck Off' which crowned their set, and are now forced to ponder some hitherto unimaginable scenarios to give them even the faintest hope of escaping the blade-wielding muscle and drooling pit bulls outside. There's a pivotal role for Saulnier regular Macon Blair as the Nazi fixer whose loyalties are about to be tested, while scariest of all is the cool rationality of the extremists' self-styled leader, Patrick Stewart, whose chilling statement of intent was lifted intact for the US poster: "Now, whatever you saw or did is no longer my concern. But let's be clear, this won't end well."

Anyone who caught Saulnier's previous film, *Blue Ruin* (2013), a slow-burner following social misfit Blair's

shambling revenge against the villains who destroyed his family, will not be surprised by the lean and mean approach adopted and intensified here. *Green Room* certainly turns all the dials to eleven, yet never at the cost of losing the painstaking formal poise it shares with its predecessor. For all the head-banging mayhem, the filmmaking is fundamentally considered, taking care to count the human cost of each and every heat-of-the-moment decision rather than merely milking the myriad shock set-pieces. As such, this modestly scaled US indie offering stands apart from the constantly excitable *faux-vérité* shaky-cam aesthetic of much contemporary action fare, coming across like a throwback to an earlier celluloid era – prime-time John Carpenter is an obvious and acknowledged reference point. In so doing, however, Saulnier flags up issues of relevance to the continuing validity of the thriller genre itself. Can the moral impact of cinematic acts of violence still carry weight in a world where we're surrounded by easily accessible images of all-too-real brutality, or indeed within a changing technological context in which digital effects offer filmmakers limitless possibilities for onscreen carnage?

I sat down with Saulnier, a youthful-looking, slightly built and highly gregarious 40-year-old, on his visit to last year's BFI London Film Festival. It turns out that the surprise success of *Blue Ruin*, a largely self-funded micro-budget attempt at establishing a film career after years of corporate videos, essentially put him on the spot. "There was studio interest, there were work-for-hire offers at a much higher scale," he recalls. "But in the end I thought it would be really cool to regress, go back to my youth in hardcore bands in Washington DC, to make a movie only I could make. And make it now. Someone was eventually gonna make a siege movie in a rock 'n' roll club – I just had to get there first."

When he puts it like that, it sounds like a classic exploitation movie set-up – which indeed it is – but for Saulnier the challenge in writing it was always to stay away from the genre train tracks. "I felt that in *Blue Ruin*, I really got into the groove with the minutiae, those inconvenient obstacles that other movies overlook," he continues. "I respect those Swiss watch screenplays, but for me it's about things unfolding the way they would in the real world... sloppy, stupid and human. So there's a number of key scenes in *Green Room* where I only allowed myself one draft. If I painted myself into a corner, I had to write myself out again, even if it meant characters got killed who I didn't really want to die. We're so used to seeing movies where everything is defended and justified. Real life is more, "Oh shit..." and that's interesting to explore in a movie about consequences. When the audience realise







they aren't going to see the next thing coming, that's the thrill of a genuine thriller."

But doesn't that mean that you're drawing on the images of real-life brutality which are all over the media these days? "No, no, not at all," he maintains. "Unfortunately we have access just a few clicks away to the sort of horrors across the globe which make *Green Room* look positively tame by comparison. You just have to try really hard not to let that stuff pollute your writing process. But there's a constant tension in the movie. On the one hand, yeah, it's a make-up show, but that kind of splatter doesn't work unless there's an emotional component to it, so we never gloss over the cost of a human life, on either side of the door. In fact, to my mind, showing acts of violence in a way that's brutal, gut-punching and actually pretty draining is far more responsible than those spectacle movies showing dozens of people mown down without any emotional impact. Hey, New York just went kaboom! *Whatever*. It's that kind of franchise filmmaking where it's okay to decimate people as long as no one cares."

Best not to expect him to be helming a superhero movie anytime soon, but given that his work generates a frisson in many cinephiles precisely because of the way it resonates with the past classics – though he says he only saw Carpenter's *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976) after he wrote the first draft of *Green Room* – does he feel like, or want to present himself as, some sort of throwback?

"I don't try to do retro, but I would like to be timeless. I actively try to take out of the movies anything which is just too present-day – in terms of costume, for instance. I came of age in the 80s, so texturally I'm referring to films like *Mad Max 2* [1981] and *RoboCop* [1987] – texturally rather than story-wise, because they're so brutal and so blunt. But in a strange way, getting back to those kinds of basics is actually forward-looking. With all these CGI spectacle films trying to out-do each other in how much they can blow up and how many people they can kill, they're actually creating an amazing space for people

like me to get in underneath them and cut them off at the knees. They may be required franchise viewing, but they're not exciting people."

Still, for all their preoccupations with the contours of genre, and perhaps despite Saulnier's protestations to the contrary, in the margins of *Blue Ruin* and *Green Room* there's definitely a certain topicality. While the former is a revenge saga in the traditional mould, it's also a cautionary tale that surely resonates with the US gun-control lobby – "This is ugly," says the old pal who supplies Macon Blair's protagonist with the firepower he needs for his task. On the surface, *Green Room* too would seem to be warning about the far-right extremists festering in the country's rural heartlands. Saulnier himself, however, sees it in even more nuanced terms.

"For me, it's actually using the neo-Nazi extremists to highlight the problems of the American Right. What Patrick Stewart's authoritarian character is actually protecting, and what he's telling his minions they're fighting for are clearly two different things. And that's the issue with the very corporate, elitist movement on the American Right, which uses all sorts of false ideology to start culture wars among the underlings, because it's about keeping them fighting each other rather than looking out for their own interests. Overall, it's not so much about the Neo-Nazis *per se*, though, as it is a critique of mainstream America.

"Foremost, *Green Room* is still about delivering this very intense movie experience for the audience. Underneath, though, there's a story about stripping away ideology and affiliation so people can get back to being just human beings. The characters are different once they can divest themselves of all that nonsense, because what comes out is that they're basically good. The hatred is learned. It's channelled. And who's doing the channelling?"



**Green Room** is released in UK cinemas on 13 May and is reviewed on page 75

*Yes, it's a make-up show, but that kind of splatter doesn't work unless there's an emotional component to it, so we never gloss over the cost of a human life*





# ECSTATIC TRUTHS

*Kathleen Collins's 1982 feature 'Losing Ground', an overlooked gem about a black female philosophy lecturer forced to reassess her marriage to a philandering painter, explores issues of class, race and gender with humour and a welcome lightness of touch*

**By Tega Okiti**

*"If there is any way in which women tend to be self-destructive it is in the area of creativity, where they actually feel their own power and can't even acknowledge it..."*

*'A Commitment to Writing', Kathleen Collins, 1988*

**Among the first of a small number** of black women to explore narrative filmmaking in the 1970s and 80s – no small feat in what was then, as now, a predominantly white male arena – Kathleen Collins was also a playwright, philosopher, teacher and activist. Her innovative film *Losing Ground* (1982) should be regarded as one of the great films of 1980s US independent cinema, but it never gained theatrical distribution and soon slipped into obscurity. Only now is it beginning to receive its due with a new restoration, 27 years after Collins's death from cancer at the age of 46. With *Losing Ground* Collins led the way for many black female independent filmmakers, such as Julie Dash (*Daughters of the Dust*, 1991), Kasi Lemmons (*Eve's Bayou*, 1997), Dee Rees (*Pariah*, 2011), Frances Bodomo (*Boneshaker*, 2013; *Afronauts*, 2014) and Ja'Tovia Gary (*An Ecstatic Experience*, 2015).

Although Collins, who was born in 1942, was raised in Jersey City, her family was originally from Gouldtown, New Jersey, America's oldest mixed-race community. The community's history stems from a marriage between Elizabeth Fenwick, the granddaughter of a British noble, and Gould, her family's free negro coachman, which caused a scandal at the time. That example of defiance, combined with the social character of the townspeople – conservative and upwardly/racially mobile – hints at the





**VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY**  
In *Losing Ground* Sara, played by Seret Scott (above left), has mixed feelings about her husband (Bill Gunn, top right) and finds herself drawn to debonair older actor Duke (Duane Jones, middle right) in a film which offers a rare depiction of a black bourgeois milieu (bottom right)

origin of Collins's interest in the black middle class and in the 'tragic mulatto' stereotype found in so many films.

Collins studied philosophy and religion to degree level, but it was during her postgraduate student years in Paris, where she took a masters in French literature at the Sorbonne, that she first developed an interest in cinema. On her return to the US she entered the world of film under the tutelage of John Carter, one of the first unionised black film editors, and earned a credit as an assistant editor on *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970), as well as filling several staff editing slots at television networks. After an unsuccessful attempt to raise funds to shoot her screenplay *Women, Sisters and Friends*, in 1974 Collins took a post teaching film history and screenwriting at New York's City University. She was already well into her tenure there before – spurred on by her subsequent filmmaking partner Ronald Gray – she made *The Cruz Brothers and Miss Malloy* (1979) on the slender budget of \$5,000.

A comedy adapted from Henry H. Roth's *The Cruz Chronicle: A Novel of Adventure*, the 49-minute film follows three Puerto Rican brothers who retreat to a town in upstate New York following their father's death during a bank robbery. There they are hired by an elderly Irish-woman named Miss Malloy to renovate her house so she can throw one last party. The film failed to gain much attention for Collins as the industry didn't quite know how to receive a work made by an African-American filmmaker that didn't engage with what most perceived to be the 'black experience'. But it was during this time that Collins began to gain recognition as a playwright,

producing several award-winning plays that explored the lives and malaise of the black middle class, such as *In the Midnight Hour* (1981), *The Brothers* (1982) and *Only the Sky Is Free* (1985).

The film industry's confusion about how to treat Collins's first film surely reinforced her conviction that race was something to explore obliquely – by examining the interiority of her characters. This was complex and fertile ground for Collins, who regarded black female oppression as something that germinates within, the result of absorbing various forms of racial and patriarchal oppression. It is this self-destructive tendency that leads Sara, the central protagonist of *Losing Ground*, on an existential journey of self-discovery. What makes the film so remarkable is the complex black female subject at its heart – a figure rarely seen, or acknowledged, on screen. The film takes us into Sara's inner life, exploring class, race and gender in ways that demand a probing and empathetic engagement from the audience.

Sara (Seret Scott) is a black middle-class philosophy professor who yearns for a deeper connection with herself, one outside the intellectual world in which she thrives. Her quest is prompted by both a desire to understand the notion of 'ecstatic' experience more deeply so she can write a treatise on the subject, and by mixed feelings about her marriage to the successful and impulsive Victor (Bill Gunn). An abstract-turned-realist painter who has just sold a painting to the permanent collection of a major gallery, Victor takes an earthier, more physical approach to his pursuit of the 'ecstatic' than she does.

In the midst of a celebration, Victor suggests the couple spend the summer in upstate New York, which she agrees to even though it means she'll be a long way from the libraries she needs to complete her thesis. Tensions mount when Victor indulges his new passion for still life – which in his interpretation includes painting Celia (Maritza Rivera), a Puerto Rican woman from the neighbouring village. Meanwhile, in an effort to explore less cerebral pursuits, Sara takes off for the city to act in a student's thesis film – a take-off of the theme of the 'tragic mulatto' and the ballad of Frankie and Johnny. Sara's co-star in the film is the tall, dark, casually cloaked Duke (Duane Jones), a mature out-of-work actor who shares her passion for philosophy.

The most affecting aspect of *Losing Ground* is the way Collins and Scott craft the image of a black woman on screen, particularly in relation to her sexuality. Sara is neither the hypersexual temptress nor the asexual 'mammie' stereotype audiences have been conditioned to expect. Instead, her search for meaning is both a mental and a sensual endeavour. Collins establishes this rejection of simplistic depictions in the film's opening scenes, in which the camera tracks through rows of predominantly male students. The shot is accompanied by the sound of her voice, which captures the intellectual interest of the students – and us – before we see Sara herself at the front, giving a lecture on chaos theory. The attention she gets from her male and female, black and white students stems from her intellect as well as her physicality.

In her discussion of sexuality and the black feminine in the film, the scholar L.H. Stallings explores the concept of 'redemptive softness' – the idea that the damage done to images of black women on screen can be undone through image-making that reaffirms and reclaims black women's beauty and sense of self. Collins achieves this by mobilising the radical aesthetic possibilities of black independent cinema and through her





love of philosophy and creative form. A scene in the middle of the film that best displays this is a dance sequence between Sara, Duke and Nelly (Michelle Mais), who are in character for the student film *Frankie and Johnny*. Sara and Duke are dancing intimately, with Nelly pitted as a rival for Duke's affection – a mirroring of the previous scene, in which Sara confronts Victor after his inappropriate advances towards Celia.

The meta-cinematic set-up of a film shoot within the film itself creates an opportunity for the exploration of Sara's sexuality and offers an insight into the complexities of the black female subject. A solo jazz saxophone played throughout the scene embodies Sara's quest, with the pauses and variations of its searching refrain a reflection of an identity fashioning itself. Visually, despite the contrast, a harmony is created between the intellectual world – symbolised by the grey concrete terrace where the dancing is set – and the way the pinks and purples of Sara's costume cling to her body. The act of dancing itself also holds a contrary position: on the surface it serves to counter the intellectual world Sara occupies, but it also functions as a symbol of sexuality, ecstasy and intuitive wordless knowledge. Most significantly, Collins doesn't fragment the female body in her depiction of dance. By filming the sequence in wide shot it re-presents the standard portrayal of black women dancing on screen as a way of expressing sexual currency. Sara is neither one thing nor the other. Scott's superb performance allows Sara's character to flow effortlessly from the sensuality of Frankie, the character she plays in the student film, to Sara the academic and fierce logician.

In her depiction of Sara and the other black and Latina women in the film, Collins presents race – as with gender, sexuality and intellect – as a facet of the characters' experiences rather than a whole. This is not to say that she takes an apolitical stance on race in an attempt to prove the existence of black humanity to a non-black audience. In an interview, published as 'A Commitment to Writing', Collins explained that she produced work for a black audience not out of a political impetus, but simply from her experience as a black woman and a desire to converse with her community. She was also intrigued by a paradox she observed within the African-American community – the desire to attain a holistic identity, despite the highly fragmented nature of their history in the US. Collins also highlighted another key motivation: "I'm much more concerned with how people resolve their inner dilemma in the face of their external reality."

These dilemmas played themselves out in what Collins called the "slight moral issue[s]" confronted in everyday life – akin to the ones found in Eric Rohmer's 'Moral Tales' (during her years in Paris Collins had worked as a translator for *Cahiers du cinéma*) or Charles Burnett's portrait of a black slaughterhouse worker in Los Angeles, *Killer of Sheep* (1978). Setting *Losing Ground* in a black middle-class milieu enabled an enquiry into these issues from the perspective of a social group rarely presented on screen. As a family of artists, Sara, Victor and her mother Leila explore the restrictions of the seemingly holistic racial identity. Sara and Victor grapple with ways of seeing and being themselves that manifest as tensions beneath the surface of daily marital interactions.

As an actress, Leila is vocal about the impact of narrow




*In this story which springs entirely from the interior life of a black woman, the political is always profoundly personal*

visions of blackness. Describing her role as the mother in a play about black people, she exposes other clichés of black womanhood: "I stand before god, the family's guiding light, a beacon of strength and humility... it's a thoroughly coloured play." Her irreverence is refreshing, and functions – along with the casts' navigation of the traps associated with their race – as a way of combating such reductive assumptions; the impetus to live entirely within racial boundaries simply doesn't occur to them.

Yet the experience of the characters in *Losing Ground* is still framed by race. Underneath the playful chatter of mulatto crises, negro traps and racial karmic debt is a political message. When we are introduced to Victor in his studio, a radio voice, murmuring low, says: "The black artist must have absolute freedom to interpret his experience stylistically – as with any other thoughts, he interprets what is real for him in a meaningful way."

The *New Yorker* critic Richard Brody has described the film's framing of race as an encounter with history's "private scars". In this story springing entirely from the interior life of a black woman – for whom prescriptions on race and gender inevitably continue to produce trauma – the political is always profoundly personal. For Collins the political impulse is subtle, complex but essentially clear: to be valid, black expression must come from within. If chaos in the exterior world exists – as Sara describes it in her lecture in the opening scene – as a "physical and emotional fact", then the categories used to define us aren't to be trusted. The only anchor we have is our ability to self-determine.

With lightness, humour and artistry *Losing Ground* created a space to celebrate and interrogate images of black women and possible routes towards their empowerment. Sadly, Kathleen Collins died just as she began to lay the foundations for a fascinating and distinctive approach to cinema. Collins left viewers and black cinema just as her character Sara did – in an enviable position on the brink of inspiration, fear and ecstasy. 

 ***Losing Ground* is out now on DVD and Blu-ray from Milestone Films. In partnership with the BFI's 'Woman with a Movie Camera' strand, *Sight & Sound* will host a screening of the film, with a panel discussion, at BFI Southbank, London, on 25 May**

**WOMAN INTERRUPTED**  
Kathleen Collins died in 1988 at the age of 46, just as she was beginning to lay the foundations for a fascinating and distinctive approach to cinema

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY MARK REID





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The great flowering of Romanian film over the past decade has resulted in numerous cinematic marvels, but perhaps none more impressive than Radu Jude's 'Aferim!', about a pair of lawmen going in search of an escaped slave in 19th-century Wallachia

By Geoff Andrew

# LIVES LESS ORDINARY

Until just over a decade ago, Romanian cinema had a pretty low international profile. A few films grabbed a little festival limelight: I caught a pair of premieres in Cannes by Romania's then most important director Lucian Pintilie – *An Unforgettable Summer* (1994), a border-clash drama set in the 1920s, and *Too Late* (1996), about a prosecutor investigating the unexplained death of a miner – and I greatly enjoyed Sinisa Dragin's prizewinning *Every Day God Kisses Us on the Mouth* (2001) in Rotterdam (sadly, his 2004 follow-up *The Pharaoh* was less impressive). But a turning point came in 2005 when Cristi Puiu's penetratingly honest study of human mortality *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* aroused considerable buzz and carried off the Un Certain Regard prize in Cannes.

That game-changer was soon followed by Corneliu Porumboiu's *12:08 East of Bucharest* (2006), Radu Muntean's *The Paper Will Be Blue* (2006), Cristian Nemescu's *California Dreamin'* (2007) and Cristian Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (2007), the last of which won – the icing on the cake – the Palme d'Or. Nearly all of these then received distribution, including in the UK. In just two years, a new Romanian cinema seemed to have burst forth, strapping and confident, as if from nowhere.

Naturally, it wasn't quite that simple. All five of these directors had already made shorts, and Mungiu, Muntean and Puiu each had an earlier feature to his name. Puiu created something of a stir as early as 2001 with his multi-prize-winning debut *Stuff and Dough*, a taut road-movie-cum-realist-thriller now regarded by some as the first feature of what later became known in some quarters as the Romanian New Wave.

There's a case to be made for Puiu as the most influential of the directors who have come to the fore in recent years. The distinctive brand of keenly observed low-key realism which first attracted attention in *Mr. Lazarescu* arguably paved the way not only for Mungiu's work after his bittersweet comedy drama *Occident* (2002) but also for films by Porumboiu, Muntean, Calin Peter Netzer and Radu Jude. This approach has been further developed in audacious, innovative and unusually rigorous ways in Puiu's three subsequent

**ANOTHER COUNTRY**  
Radu Jude's *Aferim!* (right) is unlike most historical films in that it really makes us feel as if we're seeing a world where people not only lived but thought very differently from ourselves









features, *Aurora* (2010), *Three Exercises of Interpretation* (2013) and the forthcoming *Sieranevada*.

These are not the only directors to have built up, over a relatively short period of time, a significant and interesting body of work. A recent book by Dominique Nasta, which contextualises the contemporary Romanian cinema by examining its antecedents, is subtitled *The History of an Unexpected Miracle*; at the end of the last century, no one would have predicted such an outpouring of richly rewarding cinema. Films of real substance, style and cinematic intelligence have been forthcoming for more than a decade now, many of them in the realist vein pioneered by *Mr. Lazarescu*. They're either set in the present, the recent past or, in some cases, during the last years of the country's communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, and they focus on the largely unremarkable lives of ordinary people in often strained, modest circumstances.

Despite the preponderance of this aesthetic, however, and the evident interest in social, political, ethical and philosophical issues such as health and bureaucracy or crime and punishment, it would be wrong to tar all Romanian films and filmmakers with the same ruminative brush. For within this distinctive filmic phenomenon there is considerable variety. If Mungiu and Muntean both seem fascinated by moral dilemmas, their narrative methods and aims are quite different; while Puiu and Porumboiu are juxtaposed in Nasta's study as 'minimalists', the latter's experimentalism often tends towards the playfully absurdist, while the former's bold brand of epic intimacy is at once rigorous and quietly radical.

And then there is Radu Jude, who after notching up 15 prizes with his first short *The Tube with a Hat* (2006) steadily positioned himself alongside the leading lights of Romanian cinema. His early features, *The Happiest Girl in the World* (2009) and *Everybody in Our Family* (2012), were notable for their expert blending of dark drama and black humour and for making imaginative, daring use of episodic, even intentionally repetitive narratives. To single out any film as extraordinary when Romania's 'unexpected miracle' has produced so many impressive achievements might seem invidious. Yet Jude's third feature *Aferim!* is remarkable in several ways. Apart from being one of the most original films to appear on the festival circuit in 2015, it differs from most other Romanian



*Looking at possible connections between the past and present became a bit of an obsession for me. It's a mistake to discuss the past as if it's simply dead and gone*

**KICKING AND SCREAMING** Radu Jude (above), the director of *Aferim!* (below), says he was keen not to shy away from any unsavoury aspects of Romania's past, particularly with regard to racism, which he still sees as a problem for the country



films—including Jude's own earlier work—by being set in the distant past: 1835, to be precise, three decades before the nation of Romania officially came into existence. But it's also unlike most other historical films in that it really makes us feel as if we're seeing a world where people not only lived but thought very differently from ourselves.

"You can only speak about the past from the perspective of the present," says the 39-year-old writer-director when I interview him during the London Film Festival. "I was reading about Thomas Kuhn, the philosopher of history and science, who asked his students to solve some fairly simple mathematical problems using only ideas that were in currency up until the 17th century. And nobody could do it, because it's impossible to put yourself into the mind of someone from the past. How could we know how it feels to be someone who thinks the sun goes around the earth? All you can do is try to imagine that. So there's no way *Aferim!* could be a perfect recreation of 1830s Wallachia, but that doesn't mean the result of our imaginative efforts is meaningless. I had to do two things: never forget that what we were offering was essentially a fake reconstruction; and ensure that each and every object, costume, word and idea was true to Romania, or rather Wallachia, as it was at the beginning of the 19th century. So we actually had to make almost everything; even for a sheet of paper we had to find a craftsman who knew how to make the kind of paper in use then. It was difficult."

For Jude, the motivation for making a historical film was twofold: "First, I didn't want to make any more films dealing with situations and ideas that were basically inspired by my own experiences and ideas. Not that they were autobiographical, but they did feel personal. And second, though I was bored at school by what we were told of Romanian history, which always stressed the heroism of historical figures, at some point I started reading books dealing more critically with the past—memoirs, biographies and so on—and I discovered aspects I hadn't known about: for instance, the relationship between Romania and Nazi Germany. And my interest just grew. Indeed, looking at possible connections between the past and present became a bit of an obsession.

"It's a mistake to discuss the past as if it's simply dead and long gone. At one point I started researching a failed attempt at revolution against the king around the end of the 19th century. I couldn't find a way to turn that into a film, but I did discover a lot about what we might call historical 'mentality', as opposed to historical events. And that's really what interests me."

It shows. *Aferim!* could not be more different from the comforting familiarity of heritage cinema. Its admirably straightforward, almost symmetrical story chronicles the search of a constable and his son for a runaway Roma slave accused by his high-born *boyar* owner of sexually assaulting his wife. Structurally and scenically, the film—superbly shot in black-and-white 'Scope—bears some resemblance to the classic western: the lawmen track their prey across the Wallachian wilderness, then face a dilemma on hearing their prisoner's version of events as they journey back to 'civilisation' and 'justice'. But it's what Jude does with this basic narrative format that's so exhilarating. Besides paying painstaking attention to the film's visual elements (and the costumes and sets are noteworthy in themselves), he and his co-writer, the





novelist Florin Lazarescu, created a script that's unusually archaic, credible *and* illuminating in relation to the beliefs, aspirations, values and ideas predominant at this particular time in this particular part of the Ottoman Empire. As if that weren't enough, its near surreal oaths and insults, pleas and proverbs are also often very funny; one especially foul-mouthed priest the constables meet never fails to delight with his seemingly inexhaustible litany of negative national and racial stereotypes.

Explains Jude: "Having decided to make a film about historical mentality – and social structures – which would link the past with today, I came across a story about the relationship between a Roma slave and a *boyar* woman; at the same time we found countless documents about constables looking for runaway slaves. So I just brought those two ideas together. At first, when trying to write the script, Florin and I could only wonder what the characters might say in a given situation. So we began reading popular literature of the time, newspaper reports, documents and so on. And I decided not to use our own words, but to assemble the script entirely from existing phrases we found, taking them from many different sources, putting them together like a jigsaw puzzle.

"Some proverbs tell us so much about the ideas they had then. They're also often very colourful, funny or poetic; I could never have invented language so weird, imaginative or expressive. Like when the constable says Aristotle taught the Bible to Alexander the Great. How amazing is that? Someone, thinking I wrote the line, said I was uneducated, but actually I found it in a book which was widely taught in schools at the time. People could be very confused about the past – just as we can be now."

Indeed. At one point the constable ruminates on how his world will be regarded in later centuries – inadvertently inviting us to ask ourselves the same question. Given the prejudice and cruelty on view, it's impossible not to bear in mind how depressingly little has changed in certain regards. For all its brilliantly vivid recreation of the past, *Aferim!* is topical and politically resonant.

"Years ago I worked as assistant to Costa-Gavras on *Amen*. [2002] – an important experience for me," Jude says. "When one day I asked why he only made political films, he said, 'It's impossible to make a film that isn't political.' I now agree. Any film is a public intervention

directed towards society. With *Aferim!* I wanted to encourage people to think more about the subject matter, to provoke discussion. For example, if anyone asked whether I considered Romania racist, I used to think you can't characterise a whole country like that, because people differ. But making this film I began to wonder. For instance, I've had to direct commercials to make a living. At casting sessions you show six or seven actors to the clients. I've directed around 150 commercials, but not once did the client accept an actor from the Roma community, or even one with darker skin. Some might be quite open about not wanting to cast a gypsy, others might just say, 'I don't think this person's quite right.' Either way, this shows racism at work. It's not just Romania, obviously. My point is, the problem's there and some are not admitting to it.

"So yes, it's a political film. Generally it's been received pretty warmly in Romania, though some right-wingers have taken against it. There are some who obsess that we shouldn't speak badly of ourselves. I don't understand why we're so keen to make ourselves look good to Western Europeans even if that means lying. Some people asked, 'Why make this film? Why not make one about Stephen the Great?' But I want us to have the courage to face what we are and where we come from. Being in denial still seems to be a problem in Romania."

As to the future of Romanian filmmaking, Jude – whose next, likewise ambitious project is an adaptation of Max Blecher's 1939 novel *Scarred Hearts* – is cautiously optimistic. "Funding's improved a little: in 2000 not one film was produced in Romania; it may not be perfect now, but it's certainly better than that. Also, there are good young – or maybe not so young – filmmakers working today. It's nothing to do with the film school, which is in a terrible state; it's more to do with the individuals' backgrounds and commitment to what they're doing. It's important that quite a few have decided to concentrate on day-to-day life in Romania, on the kind of problems you have in a society that's chaotic and in transition. There are a lot of things going on we can talk about."



**A retrospective, 'Revolution in Realism: The New Romanian Cinema', runs throughout June at BFI Southbank, London, and includes an extended run of *Aferim!* as well as appearances by Radu Jude, Cristi Puiu and Radu Muntean**

**SHOCK WAVE**  
(Clockwise from top left)  
*The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* (2005), *12:08 East of Bucharest* (2006), *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (2007), *California Dreamin'* (2007), *The Happiest Girl in the World* (2009) and *Aurora* (2010)



# SIGNS AND WONDERS

Some critics have been eager to dismiss 'Knight of Cups' and the other late works of Terrence Malick for their lofty spiritual ambition and increasing stylisation, but repeat viewings offer rich rewards, helping to peel back the layers beneath the opaque narratives and fractured sense of time

By Kent Jones

The 'late style' of Terrence Malick begins with *The Thin Red Line* (1998), where he obliterated strictly sequential time and situated us within the temporally elastic arena of consciousness – in this case, consciousness under the aspect of armed conflict. The Battle of Mount Austen on Guadalcanal in the South Pacific took a little over a month. In the film, one has the impression that it might have lasted a few months, or maybe a few weeks, or days – impossible to tell, fruitless to speculate.

The film is essentially a succession of states of mind kindled into being by war: the terror and the boredom and the wonder of war, the sharpened perceptions it elicits, and, perhaps more than anything else, the realisation of an uncanny fact: that the sun will continue to shine and the grasses will continue to sway in the breeze, and that the world will never metaphorically darken in the presence of bloodshed but always remain very much itself. Of course, this fix on the awesome indifference of nature is present in all of Malick, but the sense of humanity as a single living entity is new. In *Badlands* (1973) and *Days of Heaven* (1978), the action is filtered through narrators not so much unreliable as emotionally removed from the events they are recounting and taking part in. In *The Thin Red Line*, there are no narrators, but there is a chorus of individual voices quietly speaking ruminations, quick impressions, prayers and questions to God, effectively representing not only themselves but everyone – not just in the movie, but in all of existence. *The Thin Red Line*, like the films to come, is told from a point of view that lies somewhere between Emerson's 'Over-Soul' – the notion of a spiritual essence that transcends individual consciousness – and Heidegger's concept of 'Dasein' (literally 'being there'), the specific awareness humanity has of existing in the world.

Malick takes something that is present in all movies of any worth – the layering and braiding of sequential time with the experience of time filtered through individual perception – and makes the singing, reverberant friction between the central event. In his entire body of work, there is no such thing as a purely functional shot. Any image, no matter what the duration, is meant to be absorbed first as a unique moment in time and only then apprehended as a narrative unit. In *The Thin Red Line*, he also moves away from fixed perspectives and toward the balletic embrace between camera and actor/object of the last four films. There is a passage in *The Thin Red Line* in

which the camera follows Nick Nolte's lieutenant-colonel moving in lockstep with John Travolta's brigadier-general, up and down flights of steps and out on the deck of a PT boat. In this beautiful little scene, the movements work in exquisite harmony with the lieutenant-colonel's subservience and inner-voiced regret. The scene, shot by John Toll, is an early, formalised iteration of what becomes predominant in the films to follow: from *The New World* (2005) through *Knight of Cups* (2015), Malick and DP Emmanuel Lubezki explode continuity, perspective and the movie itself, creating the sensation of an incorporeal presence with 360-degree kaleidoscopic vision.

And then there is the question of acting. In *The Thin Red Line*, Ben Chaplin's character recalls the blissful life he shares back home with his wife (Miranda Otto) as he reads her letters. In the memory images that accompany the readings, Chaplin and Otto appear to be responding to suggestions from their director that have nothing to do with concrete action and everything to do with abstract ideas of 'love', 'trust' and 'sanctified union'. In these passages, the least compelling in the film, one sees a template for the acting – or, to be more precise, the work done by the actors, the dances and twirls of joy, the stylised enactments of love – in the last two films.

Acting has always occupied an uncertain and unstable position in Malick's movies. He writes scripts that require the skills of trained actors, only to sabotage the continuity of performance in the editing room (*Badlands* being the exception). In and of itself, this isn't a problem for anyone but the people who have seen their roles cut down to the nub. Unlike Godard, with whom he shares more than a few characteristics, Malick is and always has been a narrative artist, albeit one with an unusual orientation away from human specificity and toward humanity as one vast organism. This seems to be as much a matter of temperament as belief. On the one hand, he gives actors a wonderful freedom to explore the 'moment' in every sense of the word. On the other hand, there is a pervasive feeling in his work that one actor is as good as another. Ben Affleck's character in *To the Wonder* (2012) is one of the oddest pseudo self-portraits in movies. The sense of a taciturn, withholding man is conveyed in a series of silent movements across bare rooms past a wife hungry for attention and recognition – meanwhile, his face is only fleetingly glimpsed, his voice barely heard. It's Affleck, but it could just

## TIMEBENDS

In his recent, increasingly experimental, films, such as (clockwise from above) *Knight of Cups* (2015), *The New World* (2005) and *The Thin Red Line* (1998), Terrence Malick has ruptured traditional ideas of continuity and perspective












**COLD LIGHT OF DAY**  
Ben Affleck and Rachel McAdams in Malick's *To the Wonder* (2012), and Jessica Chastain and Brad Pitt in *The Tree of Life* (2011)


as easily have been Javier Bardem, who makes more of an impression as a priest having a crisis of faith, or Christian Bale, or anyone else readily available.

*To the Wonder* and *Knight of Cups* were made with a degree of freedom enjoyed by few filmmakers – only Wong Kar Wai comes immediately to mind. Malick now has a production arrangement that allows him to work without a script, to shoot wherever the spirit takes him, to compose films in the cutting room and to finish them on his own timetable. As a consequence, he now seems to be permanently ensconced within contemporary life, which marks a dramatic change. Before the brief contemporary sections of *The Tree of Life* (2011), Malick had told nothing but stories set in the American past – indeed, it was central to his identity as an artist. The one thing he cannot do with his newfound freedom is to work in period. Making a movie about Pocahontas or the taking of Guadalcanal or life on the Texas panhandle at the turn of the century requires a level of planning and organisation and execution within a finite span of time, that are no longer a part of his artistic practice. It's a little sad to realise that Malick will henceforth be making movies only set in the present. However, Malick films contemporary Houston, rural Oklahoma and Los Angeles exactly as he filmed the past: like an alien world on which he has just alighted, an array of glass and chrome and asphalt that humanity has constructed for itself, destined to fade, decay and crumble amid the constancy of nature.

Some have said that *The Tree of Life* marked the inauguration of Malick's late period, but even if we accept that, there's a clear dividing line between that film and *To the Wonder*. *The Tree of Life* is a work of memory, a recreation of the sensorial/emotional vectors of the director's own childhood. To say that the two subsequent films are less specific is to dramatically understate the case. In terms of moment-to-moment clarity of action and emotion, *Tree* is as finely wrought as *To the Wonder* and *Knight of Cups* are broadly sketched. They are bookends, spiritual passages that seem like direct outgrowths of the reportedly

vast amount of Sean Penn material excised from *Tree*. *Knight of Cups* begins with the voice of John Gielgud reading John Bunyan, but both films are pilgrimages, and both are given over to the stylisation that began with the Chaplin/Otto scenes. To be fair, I think that Malick is now in pursuit of something quite different from what he wanted in any of his previous work: the sudden, dumbstruck response to existence, *right here* and *right now*. The problem is that these mosaics of assembled instants transmit the spark only intermittently, an evasive crossing of a room here and an encounter with an impoverished non-actor there: they have overtones of actors in a fruitless search for the concrete. Malick's approach pays off more consistently in *Knight of Cups*, the better of the two films on every level, and he arrives at something awe-inspiring in the sequences with Brian Dennehy's extravagantly self-pitying father, conveyed in potent flashes that last mere seconds. The superiority of the newer film has to do with the entertainment world setting, a better fit with Malick's approach – lassitude and hedonistic depletion make a better umbrella for vague gestures than the web of embarrassments and hostilities between the couple in *To the Wonder*. I'm sure it is also a matter of practice: he's trying something new and improving as he goes. But the biggest difference is in the acting: the actors in *Knight of Cups* are simply more resourceful than their opposite numbers in *To the Wonder*.

Imperfections aside, these movies have been too readily and, sometimes, gleefully dismissed. The first film improves on repeated viewings, which allow for a better acquaintance with the emotional dilemmas of its characters; the second, some longeurs and repetitions aside, is a rich, layered, moving experience. Like *The Tree of Life* they are 'lofty' works, unashamedly out of step with their time – indeed, they look directly *through* it. And they are set in motion by, and occasionally realise, a unique ambition: the cinematic representation of spiritual progress. 

 ***Knight of Cups* is released in UK cinemas on 6 May and is reviewed on page 82**

*Malick films contemporary LA exactly as he filmed the past: like an alien world on which he has alighted, an array of glass and chrome destined to decay amid the constancy of nature*



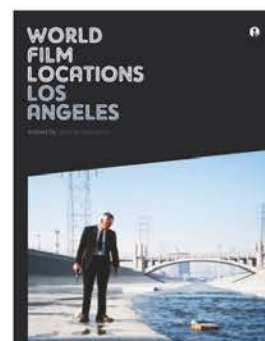
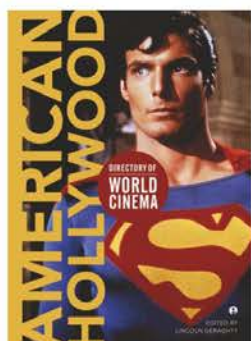
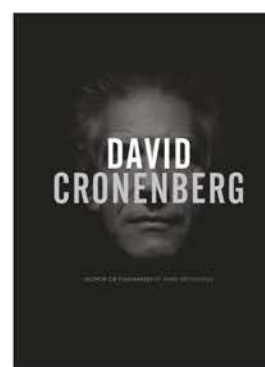
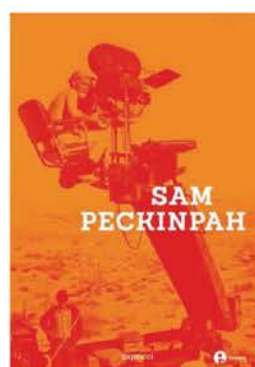
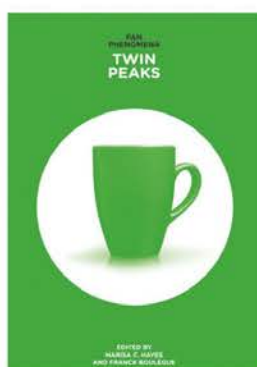
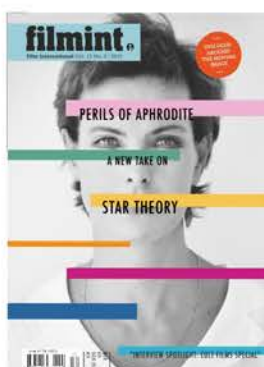
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PREVIEW

## THE RULES OF ABSTRACTION

After 50 years redefining what film can be, Malcolm Le Grice is established as one of the UK's most important avant-garde filmmakers

By Simon Payne

Malcolm Le Grice's diverse and influential career makes him one of the most eminent avant-garde filmmakers working today. He has been particularly important in Britain, where he has had a defining role in the context and history of experimental filmmaking – a role now being recognised with a career retrospective this month at BFI Southbank.

He came to filmmaking via art school, graduating as a painter from the Slade in 1965 and going on to teach at St. Martins and Goldsmiths. During this time he began making films using his own handmade equipment for printing and processing. An artisanal approach to filmmaking combined with the modernist concept of 'truth to materials' and inspiration from artists including Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg were foundations for Le Grice. Abstract colour-field works from *Matrix* (1973) through to the *3D Marking Time* (2015) are filmic takes on 'post-painterly abstraction', while classic pieces such as *Castle 1* (1966) and *After Leonardo* (originally 1973, but continually reworked) appropriate and recycle images as the basis of a critique of media.

By 1969 Le Grice's film workshop facilities were integrated with the London Filmmakers

Co-op (an organisation whose 50th anniversary the BFI is currently celebrating). Later roles on Arts Council and BFI production committees, plus increasingly senior positions in education, also enabled him to promote the field.

His filmmaking has also been closely tied to his writing. Polemical essays have provided a theoretical backdrop for his work; and through his original writing on other filmmakers from Europe and the UK, Le Grice has elaborated a history of European avant-garde film.

My own introduction to Le Grice's films, and experimental cinema more widely, came from VHS tapes I found in my art school's library in 1994, when I was a foundation student. Most were off-air recordings of two or three television series, including *Midnight Underground*, a wonderful showcase for experimental film, which had recently been broadcast on Channel 4. In tandem with Le Grice's book *Abstract Film and Beyond* (1977), which was also on the shelves, they made it possible to establish a sense of the field. Following his description of films, from early avant-garde works such as Hans Richter's *Rhythmus 21* (1921–24) through to the account of his own work and that of his peers, I quickly understood that cinema (and by extension

*From Le Grice's work I understood that cinema could be conceived in ways antithetical to everything I had taken it to be*

television) could be conceived in ways antithetical to everything I had taken it to be: drama, acting and storytelling were unnecessary; filmmaking needn't require formulaic methods of pre-production or professionalised labour; nor did its function need to be tied to an audience's entertainment. Le Grice's *Berlin Horse* (1970) is a primary example.

The experience of watching *Berlin Horse* rests on an appreciation of its almost pure plastic elements: colour, movement, rhythm and segments of time. These elements are only "almost pure" because they are activated by the film's imagery, which derives from two sets of footage. One is a shot of a horse being led round a training ring, filmed by Le Grice in the village of Berlin, north of Hamburg, and subsequently refilmed from various angles at different speeds. The other piece of footage comes from *The Burning Stable*, a film made by the Edison Manufacturing Company in 1896. Both sets of footage appear in negative and positive, as well as superimposed and vividly coloured. The imagery of the film resonates in different ways. The lunging of the horse is reflected in the film's looping structure. The added colour dramatises the burning stable scene, and calls to mind the misregistration and 'fringing' endemic in certain experimental colour processes during the early part of the 20th century. The motif of the horse in motion also places the film in a lineage that includes Eadweard Muybridge's proto-cinematic studies of animal locomotion. But for all this, the use of imagery is not directed towards drama, documentary or even reflexivity as such. The aesthetic of the film is a distinct and unique alternative to given modes and conventions of filmmaking.

Le Grice was a progenitor of the British mode of 'structural film', which found its most eloquent and confrontational advocate in Peter Gidal, whose account of 'structural/materialist film' often picks up on ideas first manifest in Le Grice's work. The critical importance of Le Grice's films was the degree to which the representational image was undermined by foregrounding other material aspects of the medium, from the surface texture of the projected image to the live experience of watching a film. To paraphrase an idea in one of Le Grice's own essays, 'Real Time/Space' (1972), the 'projection event' took precedence over represented content – an overhaul of cinema's default mode.

The image is put under stress and made opaque in numerous films throughout the early part of Le Grice's career. *Castle 1*, his most combative work, uses television and documentary film footage of industrial, political and military activities mixed with assorted audio extracts from news reports, advertising slogans and organ music. A shot of a light bulb recurs, while a real light bulb hanging in front of the screen sporadically flashes on and off, obliterating the projected image and illuminating the audience. A military-industrial complex also features in *Threshold*



King of shadows: Malcolm Le Grice presenting *After Leonardo* (1973–)



(1972), a triple-projector piece as colourful as *Berlin Horse*. Looped footage of soldiers at a sentry post materialises from swathes of red, green and yellow, subsequently splintering, from the effect of multiple superimposition, to create images on the threshold of definition.

Several of Le Grice's films involve elements of live performance or multi-projection configurations – they also exist in different versions, including new reworked digital iterations – and are often characterised as 'expanded cinema'. His most dynamic piece in this vein is *Horror Film 1* (1971). Standing in front of the screen, arms outstretched, his reach marks the dimensions of three overlapping projected colourfields. As he backs away from the screen, through the audience, his shadow becomes the image; the nearer he gets to the three projectors, the more complicated the coloured shadow becomes. *Horror film 1* is Le Grice's most majestic work because it's the figure of the filmmaker that determines the measure of the piece. But it's also a work in which the definition of the projected image is most thoroughly and provocatively questioned.

From the mid-70s Le Grice began a series of works exploring imagery that functioned in the context of narrative space. *After Manet – Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1975) alludes to the generic scene of a picnic (as painted by Manet and many others), here reimagined as an event that unfolds across four screens, depicting the perspectives of its participants. Three subsequent 'long-form' works, *Blackbird Descending – Tense Alignment* (1977), *Emily – Third Party Speculation* (1979) and *Finnegans Chin – Temporal Economy* (1981) are single-screen films which 'deconstruct' narrative conventions even more explicitly. These films, his least radical works, have rarely been shown in recent years.




**Cryptic definition: the looped footage of *Threshold* (1972)**

The mid-80s saw several short single-screen video works, originally commissioned by Channel 4, compiled as *Sketches for a Sensual Philosophy* (1986-89). Returning to a more intimate form of filmmaking – the basis of much of his early work, albeit often expanded and worked up for multi-projection – Le Grice quickly found a way to make video work in an equally direct manner. *Digital Still Life* (1984-86) is the most important of these pieces, showing a key moment in Le Grice's investigation and transformation of imagery through digital means. Employing rudimentary programming tools, the elements of a still-life composition and accompanying piano-playing are transformed into discrete tone rows, fragments of time and pixelated cells of primary colours.

Much of Le Grice's video work has used handheld observational diary footage, gleaned both from trips abroad and closer to home. Another tentatively titled compilation of these videos is *Trials and Tribulations* (1990-2004). The brevity of these pieces contrasts with the major mythopoeic works *Chronos Fragmented* (1995), *Even the Cyclops Pays the Ferryman* (1998) and *Finito* (2011), bravura films that take on grand themes of mortality and the remembrance of things past, rivalling any of Stan Brakhage's films in their scope and vision – quite an about-turn, given that a critique of Brakhage and the notion of the Romantic artist was central to some of Le Grice's earlier writing.

The potential for large format, multi-screen video projection that Le Grice has exploited since *The Cyclops Cycle* (1998/2003) takes his work back to the scale of expanded cinema that he explored in the early 1970s. The means and ends are rather different, though, with the expanded video works – including the recent *Where When* (2015), his first 3D piece – often involving explicitly personal imagery in associational, symbolic and emotive combinations. In the video pieces typifying his 'late style' the images are crisp and high-definition, though they may be complicated by compositional strategies involving collage, layering and incisive editing. By contrast, early film pieces such as *Castle 1*, *Berlin Horse*, *Threshold* and *Horror Film* counter one's sense of the meaning and substance of imagery from the outset.

Having said that, Le Grice's wide-ranging career has hardly followed a linear trajectory, especially when one notes his early interest in electronic imaging, computer programming and digital aesthetics. It has long been a maxim of his writing and reflection that 'theory follows practice'; in this regard he is fundamentally an intuitive artist. Le Grice, now 75, has often said that he has "no idea" where new work will take him; that's the expression of an attitude that defines experimental practice. 

**i** 'Crossing the Threshold: Experimental Films and Live Performances from Malcolm Le Grice' is running at BFI Southbank, London, throughout May



**The trotters' club: *Berlin Horse* (1970)**



# INDIAN SUMMER

Nazia Hassan was the queen of playback singers in the disco era – and the closest Bollywood ever got to Donna Summer

By Geeta Dayal

*Qurbani*, a 1980 Bollywood thriller featuring a motorcycle stuntman who gets caught up in a series of heists, was not a great film. What made *Qurbani* stand out was the music – mostly the handiwork of the Bollywood producer duo Kalyanji-Anandji, but featuring the startling debut of the Pakistani pop singer Nazia Hassan, in a track produced by the disco don Biddu. Biddu had achieved major success earlier in the 1970s after producing Carl Douglas's international mega-hit 'Kung Fu Fighting', and it seemed that everything he touched in those days turned to gold.

The track was 'Aap Jaisa Koi' – an instant classic. The lyrics were romantic, chaste: they begin, roughly translated, "If someone like you would come into my life – it would be so nice." The soft, lilting tune – sung with innocent sweetness by Hassan, who was then 15 years old – became a hit in India, Pakistan and beyond. In *Qurbani*, the film star Zeenat Aman lip-synchs to the song while gyrating on a light-up disco floor wearing a racy red dress, flanked by a battalion of backup dancers. The dance number makes no sense in the context of the film, just there to add a spark of excitement – a common Bollywood tactic. But 'Aap Jaisa Koi' broke Hassan into the big league, and she soon became a household name on the subcontinent – Pakistan's sweetheart, and India's too.

There were other Bollywood films in 1980 with memorable disco soundtracks, notably *Shaan* and *Karz*. *Shaan* – the director Ramesh Sippy's much anticipated follow-up to his 1975 classic *Sholay* – featured an epic disco tune called 'Pyaar Karne Wale', written by R.D. Burman and sung by Bollywood playback queen Asha Bhosle in her trademark radiant soprano. *Karz* featured the mega-hit 'Om Shanti Om', sung with exuberant fervor by Kishore Kumar and produced by the dynamic duo Laxmikant-Pyarelal.

The 'playback singer' – the vocalist who sings the songs behind the scenes, and generally does not appear in the film – is Bollywood's bread and butter. Top playback singers such as Bhosle, who is now 82 years old, and her sister Lata Mangeshkar, now 86, are big stars in their own right. They have sung tens of thousands of film songs over the decades; their familiar voices have animated generations of Bollywood stars, who happily lip-synch to them during song-and-dance numbers. It requires a certain suspension of disbelief to watch a youthful star on screen singing with a playback voice of someone old enough to be her grandmother – and a belief in the transporting magic of Bollywood.

But many of these big-time playback singers could never quite transcend the trappings of their own immense virtuosity to fully embrace the machine sounds of disco. As Hassan grew older, she proved herself to be something different, mapping a way for a new Bollywood



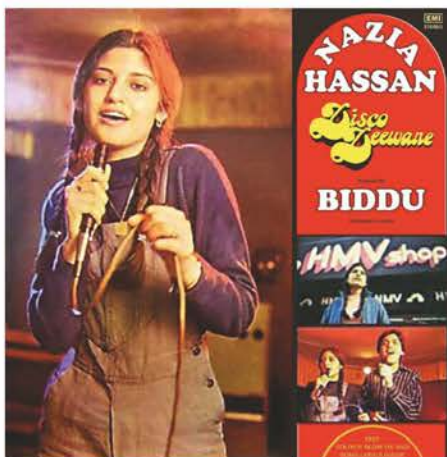
That synching feeling: Zeenat Aman in *Qurbani*, miming to the voice of Nazia Hassan (below left)

disco sound. She was strikingly beautiful, often more beautiful than the film stars she was singing behind the scenes for. Her voice was in stark contrast to the syrupy soprano of singers like Mangeshkar and Bhosle. She had a somewhat lower vocal range than other playback singers; she sang her lines straighter, eschewing theatrics and excessive ornamentation. She was unique, different rather in the way that Charanjit Singh – the late Bollywood session musician, who was then on the verge of producing a prescient proto-acid house album called *Ten Ragas to a Disco Beat* – was different.

New sounds were in the air. In 1981, Kraftwerk

*Resolutely modern, Hassan's singing has never been replicated. Decades later, 'Boom Boom' still sounds like the future*

came to India, playing two well-attended concerts in Bombay for the 'Computer World' tour. A few Bollywood movies that year sported tracks that hinted at electro – such as R.D. Burman's disco tune 'Dil Lena Khel Hai Dildar Ka', from the movie *Zamane Ko Dikhana Hai*. 1981 also unleashed Hassan's debut full-length record with her brother





Zoheb – India's first hit disco album that didn't depend on a Bollywood film for success. *Disco Deewane* ('Mad for Disco') was produced by Biddu, who was rapidly becoming the Giorgio Moroder to Hassan's Donna Summer. It swept the subcontinent and charted in 14 countries, selling hundreds of thousands of copies.

The immense success of *Disco Deewane* foreshadowed a run of Bollywood disco movies. In 1982 came two of the most over-the-top specimens of the Bollywood disco genre: *Disco Dancer* and *Star*. *Disco Dancer* was a stone-cold classic of B-movie ridiculousness, about a hero who rises from street-singer to disco champion, with a dynamite soundtrack produced by the Bollywood disco svengali Bappi Lahiri. *Star* was mostly forgettable, short of *Disco Dancer*'s hilarity and goofball charm. Briefly summarised, the plot goes like this: a boy named Dev sets his sights on being a big music star. He eventually gets a job at a joint called Charlie's Disco, where he meets a girl named Maya and falls in love. Dev gets beaten up, and Maya falls in love with someone else.

But the soundtrack, produced by Biddu and sung by Nazia and Zoheb Hassan, was something else. Looking back at *Star*, it's easy to see that the true star of the movie was Hassan, the unforgettable playback singer. The haunting disco song 'Boom Boom', featuring a hard, arpeggiated Moroder-style bassline with Hassan's vocals floating over the top, was the closest that Bollywood ever got to the 1977 Moroder/Summer smash hit 'I Feel Love'. It showed Hassan to be another creature entirely, resolutely modern, signalling a path for a minimal disco sound. Hassan's singing has never been replicated. Decades later, 'Boom Boom' still sounds like the future.

Bollywood carried on making disco movies. Hassan went on to make more music with her brother – their 1984 hit *Young Taran* was the first album in Pakistan to use music videos – but she left music in 1992 to pursue other interests. By 2000, her life had fallen apart: she was simultaneously struggling with illness and a failed marriage. The luminous Pakistani disco diva died of lung cancer in London that year, aged 35. Her spirit lives on in her strange and beautiful disco records. Rumours abound in India that a biopic is in the works, starring a major Bollywood actress. But matching Nazia Hassan's voice may be, to this day, an impossible feat. 📺



## PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

A German documentary about space was taking audiences on a cosmic trip more than 40 years before Kubrick



A view of Saturn from one of its moons

By Bryony Dixon

Among many great events at this year's Hippiest – the Hippodrome Festival of Silent Film, held at Bo'ness near Falkirk in late March – was one experience that had real appeal for a non-specialist audience: a trip to the stars 1925 style, and the nearest we have to a silent forerunner of 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (1968). Perhaps that's pitching it a bit strong, but early sci-fi film gets people excited and this film has only been in the canon a few years, so even among enthusiasts it is not well known.

*Wunder der Schöpfung* (*Wonder of Creation*, 1925) is an astonishing experiment in popular science, trying to impart what was at that date cutting-edge knowledge of space. Using special effects (a team of 15 SFX men worked with four professors checking for scientific accuracy), glorious tinting and toning and fantastical sets, the film takes the form of a journey – a splendidly effective device, which persuades the viewer to suspend judgement and accept an awful lot of informative intertitles along the way. It takes us around the sun and the moon and to the planets, explaining gravity on Earth and off, and gives us the first representation of weightlessness (anticipating 2001 with cosmic travellers walking round the walls of a circular spaceship). Acted scenes are interspersed with lavishly used models, diagrams and time-lapse photography. The fantastical visualisation of Saturn's rings and the surface of Mars – and our own planet, not yet seen from space – must have been mind-blowing. Viewers also get a history of astronomical discoveries, some humorous scenes, looking at the earth from light years away to see events in the past (including the inevitable dinosaurs), and a bizarre end-of-the-world sequence as the Earth and humankind finally come to a scientifically predictable halt.

The premiere took place in the art deco jewel of the Hippodrome, Scotland's oldest continuously used cinema. As the name suggests, the cinema is round, with a balcony and domed ceiling in blue, painted with stars – thoroughly appropriate. John C. Brown, Astronomer Royal for Scotland, introduced the sold-out show, giving us some background to the science of the



Mankind being awed by the heavens

*The visualisation of Saturn's rings and the surface of Mars must have been mind-blowing*

1920s and a few tips on the time-space continuum, illustrated with a magic trick.

Professor Brown's presence was explained by the fact that he is the father of the drummer Stuart Brown, who with the keyboard-player Paul Harrison forms the duo Herschel 36: their improvised electronica score was one of the best musical accompaniments I've heard. The band is named after a blue star at the heart of the Lagoon Nebula but, Harrison said, "It's entirely coincidental that a group with this name has ended up doing this." The duo had to adjust their usual improvisational working method to hit the film's various cues: "We get certain sounds and vibes, and doing the film gives us focus on knocking things into shape to fit the film, though sometimes in a way you wouldn't necessarily think!" Harrison added. "It's totally new to me."

I suspect these talented, adaptable musicians are being modest. Their supremely confident but loose score fitted the film beautifully, helping to create the right sense of scale and forward motion – most successfully when gliding past the planets and through the starscape – and carrying a sense of playfulness and mystery appropriate to the 'wonder of creation'. Both film and score, commissioned by Hippiest and Film Hub Scotland, set off on their own elliptical progress through 2016. 📺

**i** *Wunder der Schöpfung*, with a live score performed by Herschel 36, will be shown at venues around Scotland in September

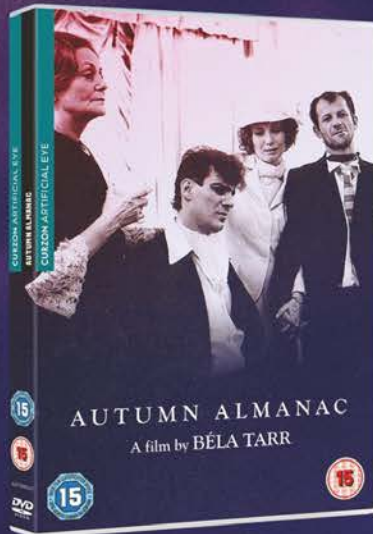


Weightless in space, in an anticipation of 2001



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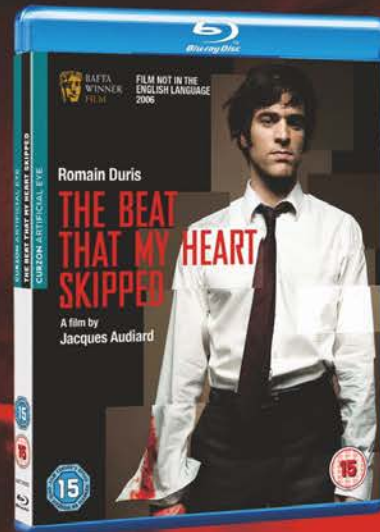


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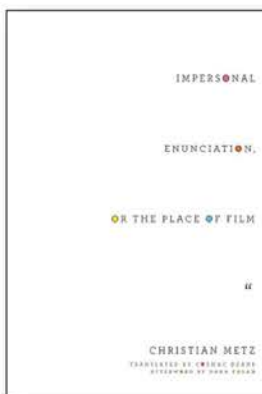
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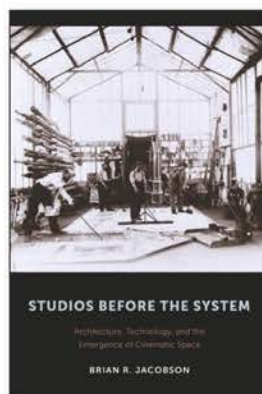
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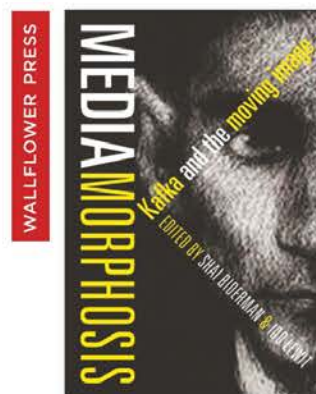
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# PATH OF MOST RESISTANCE

Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen showed that films could be a vehicle for theoretical enquiry every bit as effective as writing

By Oliver Fuke

Laura Mulvey (born 1941) and Peter Wollen (born 1938) are often rightly described as groundbreaking film theorists. Their influential early texts have proved indispensable for subsequent generations looking for new approaches to making, thinking and writing about film. However, over the last 40 years or so the pair have also been involved in a number of other important activities which have received less attention. These include, but are not limited to: militant political work; pedagogy; writing and theorising about art; curating immensely influential exhibitions; and filmmaking.

Having already begun writing about film from a theoretical perspective, the pair went on to make six films together between 1974 and 1983, the period in which they published some of their most influential essays. Read together, these essays offer a deciphering of, and challenge to, dominant cinematic codes. They also begin to map out alternative strategies for filmmaking, particularly feminist filmmaking – something Mulvey discussed with great clarity in her article 'Film, Feminism and the Avant-Garde' (1978), in which she sketches out an alliance between feminist and avant-garde filmmaking.

Although their films have many of the common features of the 'essay film' – chapter structure, citation of other arts, foregrounding and de-naturalisation of technique – Mulvey and Wollen called them 'theory films'. Through essayistic techniques they addressed the problems they were exploring in their theoretical writing. Freedom from discursive protocol – that is, not having to develop a sustained argument to a conclusion – let them proceed more speculatively or boldly. The pair used film to critique existing images and gazes by countering them with others.

Their first film together was *Penthesilea: Queen of the Amazons*, a self-funded project made in 1974 while Wollen was teaching at Northwestern University. It comprises five sections, and has much in common with Mulvey's essay 'Fears, Fantasies and the Male Unconscious' (1973). In the first section, there is a long, static shot of a mime company doing a performance based on Heinrich von Kleist's play *Penthesilea*. The clashing of swords and the wailing of voices provide the soundtrack. In interviews, the pair have said that they were drawn to the psychoanalytic aspects of the play, and wanted to explore whether the Amazons were a feminist myth or a male fantasy myth. In the second section, Wollen offers an explanation of the previous sequence direct to camera. He also articulates the critical ambitions for the film: "We wanted to make a film without editing. We wanted to call this imaginary world into question." As this dialogue unfolds, the camera starts to wander off – a little like the mind of a bored student in a lecture – observing the cue cards from which Wollen is reading. The camera strategy and lack of editing were



I'll be your mirror: Peter Wollen reflects


*We wanted to make a film without editing. We wanted to call this imaginary world into question*

intended, Mulvey later explained, to "negate possible and expected shifts in look [...] and undercut the looker/looked-at dichotomy". So there is a coming together of Wollen's ideas about editing and Mulvey's work on visual pleasure.

*Penthesilea* is counter-cinema *par excellence*. Their second film, *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977), to a certain extent moves beyond what Mulvey called "the scorched earth of counter-cinema". Its seven sections are arranged symmetrically. In the central section, 'Louise's story told in thirteen shots', each shot is a 360-degree pan that foregrounds and denaturalises the camera's work. At the same time, the motif of the circle, present in both the camera work and Mike Ratledge's music, meshes neatly with the film's overarching concerns: the circular nature of problems relating to motherhood in patriarchal society.

*Riddles* is remarkable for at least three reasons. First, it tries to confront the politics of motherhood on two levels, the concrete and the psychoanalytic. Second, it combines

aspects of the traditions Wollen described in his hugely influential essay 'The Two Avant-Gardes' (1975). Third, there is an attempted rehabilitation of narrative – quite bold in the anti-narrative context of experimental film in England in the 1970s. Narrative and 360-degree pans combine to startling effect.

In the 1980s, Mulvey and Wollen directed four more films together, maintaining a complex relationship to narrative – neither a complete refusal nor complete acceptance. *AMY!* (1980) explores the image of the heroine, focusing on Amy Johnson. Like *Riddles* and *Penthesilea*, it has features of the essay film, while *Crystal Gazing* (1982) and *The Bad Sister* (1983) employ an altogether different strategy. *Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti* (1983) is a documentary related to an exhibition the pair curated at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1982 (the first retrospective of Kahlo's work outside of Mexico). Looking back, Mulvey and Wollen's films – made both in collaboration and independently of one another – seem more critical, complex and intriguing than ever. 

**The season 'Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen: Beyond the Scorched Earth of Counter-cinema' runs at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, from 12-22 May. A selection from the season will be shown at HOME, Manchester, in August**



Peter Wollen in *Penthesilea* (1974)



*Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977)





The *Journal of Film Preservation* is published twice a year by the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF). It offers a forum for both general and specialized discussions on all theoretical, technical and historical aspects of moving image archival activities. Articles are written in English, French or Spanish, with summaries in the other two languages.

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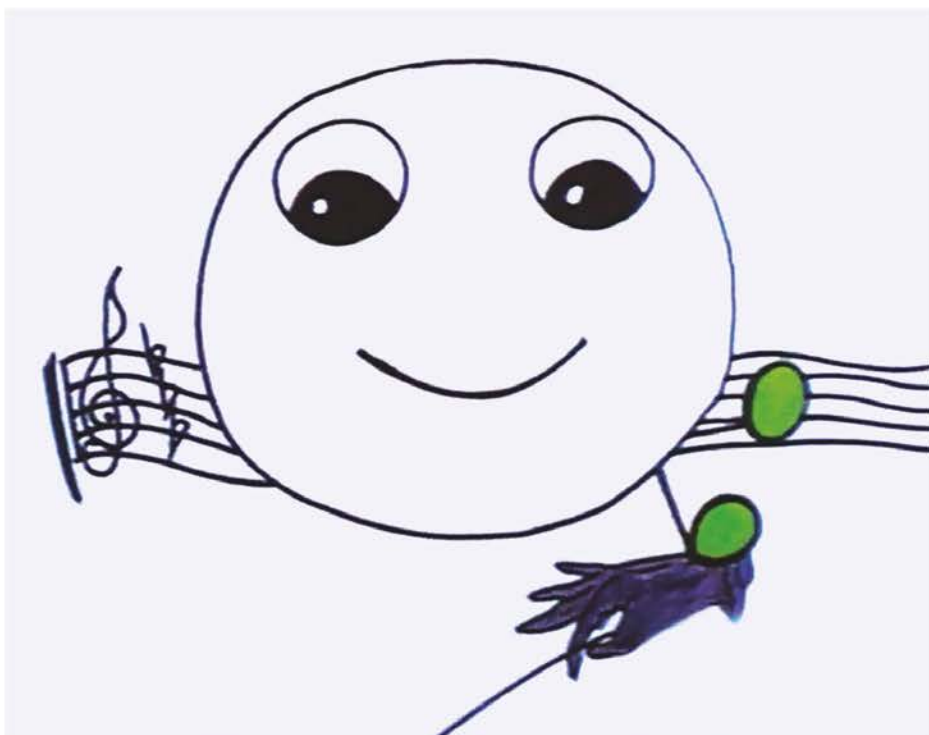
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# CHERCHEZ LES FEMMES



Lonely are the breves: Mollie Butler's noteworthy animation *Magnum Opus* (1981)

A project to uncover the history of amateur filmmaking by women in Britain has turned up some unexpected gems

**By Ros Cranston**

*Sally Sallies Forth* (1928) is an apt title for a pioneering film in the history of women's filmmaking. It is an inventive and classy comedy, featuring an "all-star cast", which tells the story of a young woman who yearns for the better things in life and seizes the moment to escape the confines of her humble background.

*Sally Sallies Forth* is the earliest film in an eclectic collection recently unveiled by the East Anglian Film Archive (EAFA) as part of their Women Amateur Filmmakers in Britain project. It was made by a group of women who met through London cine clubs, and has been heralded as the first British all-female amateur production – it boasts a cast of nine in an array of ingenious, sometimes bizarre roles, not least the 'chauffeuse', or female chauffeur, who likes to show a bit of frilly bloomer while investigating goings-on under the bonnet. The part is played by the multi-talented Frances Lascot, who also directed, co-produced and wrote the film.

"Contrary to popular opinion," says Dr Sarah Hill, who has been working on the Women Amateur Filmmakers project, "women have been centrally involved in amateur filmmaking, working as solo filmmakers, in cine club teams and as part of husband-and-wife partnerships." But their films have rarely been seen beyond specialist audiences, and the EAFA project is a welcome inflection of film history. It features 142 films made by women between the 1920s and 1980s, including travelogues, animation,

dramas, documentaries and records of everyday life. All the films are Institute of Amateur Cinematographers (IAC) award-winners; they have been newly catalogued and many have been digitised, with more to follow. Already a number of startlingly ambitious, stylish and varied films are available to view on the EAFA website.

Among a strong line-up of animated films are Mollie Butler's *Magnum Opus* (1981), the charismatic, poetic tale of a disabled semi-breve – the musical note, that is – made for the International Year of Disabled People, and Sheila Graber's *The Cat and the Tune* (1977), another musical short. Graber began experimenting on her own with a super 8 Camera, and has said that she "would have continued just for fun had I not joined a local cine club". She went on to pursue a professional career in animation, including working on the much-loved *Paddington* series for television.

The collection also includes a range of far-ranging travelogues, often made by wealthy holidaying couples – notably Eunice and Eustace Alliot from Buckinghamshire and Laurie and Stuart Day from Stoke-on-Trent. Their films afford tantalising glimpses of their own well-to-do domestic set-ups before and after their adventurous trips; the Days' 1938 *The Last Year of Peace* (1948) evokes nostalgia for an idyllic pre-war lifestyle in Staffordshire as well as recording their picturesque travels in Switzerland.

In the 1920s a number of intrepid and well-heeled women began to explore the world and

*The cast includes the 'chauffeuse', or female chauffeur, who likes to show a bit of frilly bloomer while investigating under the bonnet*



*The Cat and the Tune* (1977)



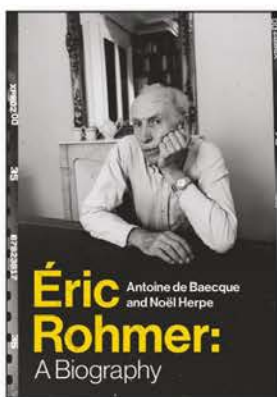
*Sally Sallies Forth* (1928)

record it on cine camera. Examples of their work are included in the EAFA project and can also be found in the collections of the BFI National Archive. Rosita Forbes, an explorer and filmmaker from Lincolnshire, led a remarkable life which saw her hunting tigers in India at 19, married at 21 and divorced a few years later. Having decided on "a career of adventure", she continued to travel. With cameraman Harold Jones she filmed their groundbreaking trip to Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) as *Red Sea to Blue Nile* (1926) – though the surviving section of the film preserved in the BFI National Archive is sadly brief.

Some of the extensive holdings of amateur films in the BFI National Archive are being made available as part of the Unlocking Film Heritage programme. These include some striking female contributions. One of the most melodramatic – and politically resonant – is *The Road to Hell* (1933), made by a group of politically active amateur filmmakers in 1937 in protest at the hardship caused by the means test, which the poor had to pass in order to qualify for financial assistance. It tells its story with gusto. The novelist Naomi Mitchison stars as the Mother, while her son's girlfriend is played by Daisy Postgate, daughter of the Labour Party leader George Lansbury. As was often the case in amateur films, it was a family affair – Daisy's husband Raymond Postgate co-wrote and directed the film as well as playing "The Father" (her young actress niece Angela Lansbury does not appear). With its inventiveness and in-your-face attitude, the film offers much to enjoy – it can be watched for free on the BFI Player.

In *Sally Sallies Forth*, the intrepid Sally realises at last that she's better off returning to her familiar lowly station. For the amateur female filmmakers whose work is being showcased on these new public viewing platforms, the horizons are thankfully wider. 📺





Éric Rohmer

*A Biography*

ANTOINE DE BAECQUE

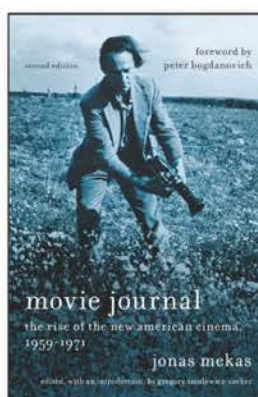
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# Reviews



## 72 **Florence Foster Jenkins**

*Stephen Frears's film boasts an astonishing virtuoso performance from an undubbed Meryl Streep, who has evidently now added the art of singing excruciatingly off-key to her ever-expanding list of talents*



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Turban legends: Crista Alfaite as Sheherazade with Américo Silva as her father, the Grand Vizier

## Arabian Nights Volume Three The Enchanted One

Portugal/France/Germany/Switzerland 2015  
Director: Miguel Gomes

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Miguel Gomes's stated intention with his *Arabian Nights* trilogy, which this instalment completes, was to combine an account of the economic and social privations suffered by his native Portugal in 2013-14 with elements of escapist fable inspired by the stories of *The 1001 Nights*. As she spins story after story to delay her own execution at the hands of King Shahryar, Scheherazade becomes a prisoner strangely complicit in her own imprisonment, and an exile from life who must nonetheless remain vividly connected to it. So the stringent austerity imposed on Portugal forces it to eke out a suspended existence, in which it must continually assert its own right to live while being deprived of the freedom to live that life fully. Storytelling (or filmmaking) might fill the resulting space; but in doing so, is it offering escape from disaster or simply deferral of it?

By the simplest interpretation, Gomes's project celebrates the infinite variety of life experience

and the tenacity of the creative instinct. Whatever conditions beset us as individuals or as peoples, the urge to impart, explain, gossip and dissemble unites us. Clearly the trilogy also interrogates, in common with Gomes's previous work and with much recent Portuguese cinema, where what we call 'documentary' ends and what we call 'fiction' begins. But it meditates, too, on the layering of history in both life and art – the subliminal echoing of experience through generations; the unseen ways in which the adventures and traumas of previous lives infect present lives; and the reinterpretation by one artist of another artist's work through homage, adaptation or cover version. The Latin jazz standard 'Perfidia' haunts Gomes's trilogy in multiple stylistically diverse interpretations, while his own storytelling style at different moments calls to mind Manoel de Oliveira, Chris Marker and Pier Paolo Pasolini, to name but a trio of reference points.

Pasolini's own *Arabian Nights* (1974) concluded his 'Trilogy of Life', and his influence looms particularly large over the final chapter of Gomes's trilogy – or at least over its opening half. Scheherazade (Crista Alfaite) departs her husband's kingdom to take a solo romp around an idyllic Old Baghdad in which she

encounters a range of salty characters. We might suppose that she is amassing tales to add to her nocturnal repertoire, were it not for her fatalistic conviction that the time she has borrowed so far is coming to an end. As it is, this has the feeling of a final fling – and of a wealth of stories that are started only to be abandoned, in the style of Italo Calvino's 1979 novel of repeated beginnings, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*.

The tale on which Scheherazade and the film settle is not that of the gorgeous blond beach bum who has fathered 200 children (which might have been Pasolini's choice); nor that of the dancing



Enchantment: Crista Alfaite





Net losses: the wind genie

segment – it's a bit like turning the page of a madcap magic-realist novel and encountering newsprint. This structure represents to some extent a reversal of the intention Gomes declared in *Volume 1 – The Restless One*, to create “a militant film which soon forgets its militancy and starts escaping reality”. If it seems a little surprising that the same Scheherazade we have seen roaming and seducing and singing her way around an exotic archipelago would prove to be such a stickler for *vérité*, Gomes offers the notion that a degree of romance fatigue has set in. Presented with a handsome suitor, Scheherazade rejects him on the grounds that he's too stupid for her; on discovering a supposedly rare and richly

*It's hard to draw any conclusions at all about a work that so cheerfully rejects any expectations regarding rhythm, mood or fixed meaning*

fragranced flower much praised by poets, she is unimpressed with its scent and casts it away.

So does the film ultimately argue that imagination is a decadent distraction from the real work of revolution? It would be hard to draw such a conclusion about a film that dwells so long on the artistry of chaffinches, or summons its mythical heroine to a meeting with her father via a banner tacked to an aeroplane that reads “XEHERAZADE, SERIOUS FAMILY TALKS, NOW!” Hard to draw any conclusions at all, in fact, about a work that so cheerfully rejects any expectations regarding rhythm, mood or fixed meaning. Viewers are liable to take exception to certain lacks or excesses in line with personal bias. For my part, I really wish the English-language captions had been proofread to sort out their syntax and pronouns, which are distractingly messy. I would also be forced to admit, however, that messiness and wilful disregard for rules are part of the point of a provocative, confounding project, which manages to honour its progenitors in cinema and storytelling while casting off most of what convention might demand of it. ☹

thief who seduces a noblewoman, kills her husband and meets his own tragic fate years later. Such flights of whimsy touch the narrative only briefly. Scheherazade instead relates the story of a group of working-class Portuguese men who are devoted to trapping chaffinches and training them to sing competitively – a Belgian tradition imported into Portugal via the trenches of World War I which inspires fanatical devotion in its practitioners. Gomes's film at this point shifts into an ostensibly conventional documentary mode, though it retains the fanciful onscreen captions that supply glimpses of the characters' backgrounds and personalities. Only one of these asides is developed into a separate story, related in the first person by a Chinese student who visits Lisbon on a scholarship and falls into a relationship with one of the bird-trappers.

The story of these gruff chaffinch enthusiasts provides a subject at once so earnest and so whimsically evocative that a viewer not already familiar with it might suspect it of being the invention of a sly cabal of documentary festival programmers dedicated to keeping themselves in material. Its matter-of-fact presentation, however, is a step change for the viewer after the rich jollity and theatricality of the opening

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producers

Luis Urbano  
Sandro Aguiar

#### Screenplay

Miguel Gomes  
Mariana Ricardo  
Telmo Churro

#### Directors of Photography

Sayombhu Mukdeeprom  
for *The Inebriating Chorus of the Chaffinches*:

Lisa Persson

#### Editing

Telmo Churro  
Pedro Filipe Marques  
Miguel Gomes

#### Art Directors

Artur Pinheiro  
Bruno Duarte

#### Sound

Vasco Pimentel  
Wardrobe

Silvia Grabovski  
Lucha d'Orey

#### Production

©O Som e a Fúria,  
Shellac Sud,  
Komplizen Film, Box  
Productions, AGAT  
Films, ARTE France  
Cinéma, ZDF/ARTE

#### Companies

O Som e a Fúria  
presents in  
co-production  
with Shellac Sud,

Komplizen Film,  
Box Productions,  
ARTE France Cinéma

and ZDF/ARTE  
with the participation  
of ARTE France, RTP,

RTS - Radio Télévision  
Suisse, SRG SSR,  
AGAT Films&CIE,

Michel Merkt  
with the support  
of ICA, Eurimages,

CNC, Région  
Provence-Alpes-Côte  
d'Azur, Office Fédéral

de la Culture (DFI)  
Suisse, Cinéforum,  
Loterie Romande

A film by Miguel  
Gomes  
Supported by  
Institut Français

Executive Producer  
Luis Urbano

Cast  
Crista Alfaia  
Scheherazade/  
Countess Beatriz

#### Hesler

Américo Silva  
Grand Vizier  
Amar Bounachada

King Shahryar  
Lionel Franc  
Lionel Franc

Carloto Cotta  
Paddleman  
Jing Jing Guo

Lin Nuan  
Chico Chapas  
Chico Chapas,

trapper  
Gonçalo Waddington  
chaffinch fancier

In Colour  
[2.35:1]  
Subtitles

Distributor  
New Wave Films

End credits title  
Volume Three, The  
Enchanted One

Portuguese  
theatrical title  
As mil e uma  
noites Volume

3, o encantado

Baghdad, “in the antiquity of time”. More than 500 days after submitting herself to marriage to the tyrannous King Shahryar, Scheherazade continues to defer her execution by telling him stories. Her father, the Grand Vizier, yearns to set her free, but she suspects that she will soon be put to death. Scheherazade leaves the kingdom alone to visit Old Baghdad, where she encounters nomads, thieves and genies of the wind, plus the wildly fertile Paddleman, who has 200 children. Paddleman declares his love for her and offers to give her a child, but she refuses him. On the 515th night with the king, Scheherazade tells him a story, “The Inebriating Chorus of the Chaffinches”.

In the restive and recession-hit Lisbon of 2013, a group of working-class men trap and keep chaffinches for singing competitions, a Belgian tradition that passed to Portugal in World War I. We see the men training their birds in preparation for a tournament, and hear of their diverse backgrounds. One of the men provides a link to another story, “Hot Forest”, about a young Chinese woman who comes to Lisbon on a student scholarship. She has an affair with him, becomes pregnant and has an abortion, whereupon he abandons her. She becomes companion to an old woman who dies in a fire, and then goes back to Beijing.

We return to the chaffinch competition. On his way home, the veteran trapper Chapas finds a wind genie caught in a bird net, and frees him.



## Everybody Wants Some!!

USA 2014

Director: Richard Linklater

Certificate 15 116m 32s

See Feature  
on page 22

Reviewed by  
Pamela Hutchinson

"Maybe the 80s will be radical," muses one of the teens in Richard Linklater's breakout hit *Dazed and Confused* (1993).

Whereas the kids in that 70s-set film are trying to escape a decade – and a high school – that "obviously suck", the young people in Linklater's new film face the prospect of a college career loaded with expectation at the start of the 80s. Teed up as a spiritual sequel to *Dazed and Confused*, college comedy *Everybody Wants Some!!* shares the earlier film's fascination with generational rites of passage, but edges its characters towards individualism and away from the collective. Shadowing a Texas university baseball team over a long weekend in August 1980, this is about the identity crisis brought on by different times and strange surroundings, about who to be and how to compete in a new world.

Jake (*Glee*'s Blake Jenner) is the film's hero, a square-jawed pitcher confident enough to hold his own in his teammates' ribald back-and-forth, but just soft enough to fall for their pranks and be designated "the quiet guy" by a hard-to-impress girl on the first day. Jenner's background in teen TV perfectly suits him to this mostly wholesome role – an unscarred innocent whose accelerated development over the course of the film requires the occasional spark of anger or lusty determination. His meandering progress through his first steps on campus, before classes begin, forms the film's loose, repetitive structure. Each day is devoted to seemingly meaningless bro chat, each night to a party. It's a symptom of what Jake calls his pre-term "identity crisis" that each party entails a change of venue, a different kind of music and a new look. He and his pals are adaptable, merely adding a hat or a duck-feet necklace to pass at each club, but that's because their personalities are as yet only half-formed.

As a college movie, *Everybody Wants Some!!* is part of a genre stretching from *The Freshman* (1925) to *National Lampoon's Animal House* (1978), in which rules are broken, bonds forged, love found and indignities dealt out in a blur of sport and partying. As a comedy, it's frequently hilarious, from the wisecracking dude banter that smothers almost every scene to set pieces such as an eccentric player's freak-out over a drinks order, which turns into an elongated discotheque brawl. A bong session draws laughs out of ludicrous drugged-out mysticism, which in turn offers moral guidance to our young heroes. There's none of the humiliating gross-out humour that dominates modern teen comedy, giving the film an affable, breezy appeal – although, as often happens in Linklater-land, apparently light-hearted scenes are tinged with violence. The rush of what loudmouth older student Finn (a snappy, verbose turn by Glen Powell) calls "fuckwithery", a form of humour that feeds off a victim, falters only when it threatens to do some serious ego damage, or when an unfortunate choice of words dents the team's heterosexual machismo. The queasy look on the face of Dale (J. Quinton Johnson) after he splutters "temptation, my asshole" is a puerile case in point.



Pipe dreams: Blake Jenner as Jake, Glen Powell as Finnegan

The two exclamation marks in the title are borrowed from a 1980 track by Van Halen, and while they're a typographical horror, their excessive urgency suits the film and the testosterone-pumped protagonists well. The teammates' constant ribbing is all part of their relentless competitiveness, which produces outbursts of violent temper and can even draw blood: a loss at table tennis results in a splintered bat; a simple game that involves smacking the opponent's knuckles leads to a gruesome close-up of a swollen and seeping joint. When the players

finally take to the baseball field to practise, their initially harmonious athleticism dissolves into a messy clash of personalities that establishes the game's inherent split between team endeavour and opportunity to display individual talents.

It's not easy for Jake and his fellow freshmen to find a place in this knife-edge dynamic, and an initiation ritual marks the pain of their introduction to college life. A hazing rite involving yards of duct tape and a flurry of baseballs is just as brutal as the beatings dished out by the older kids in *Dazed and Confused*,



Party pack: Glen Powell and the baseball gang



Costume drama: Blake Jenner, Zoey Deutch





Russell), advises Jake early on to embrace his "inner fucking strange". It's tough advice to take when conformity is the squad goal: the point of all that joshing is to squash the tall poppies, and the team's de facto leader Finn takes pride in his crew's "pack mentality". He emphasises the importance of being average each time he chats up a co-ed, describing the merely middling dimensions of his genitals. But Jake and Finn (whom Jake pegs as a "rationalist") have almost emerged from their jock chrysalises at the end of the film. Finn reveals his true self through quirky accessories (a pipe, a kaftan and a Kerouac novel), while Jake embarks on a cute romance with the girl he met on the first day, performing arts student Beverly (Zoey Deutch).

The first flush of the romance, a dorky split-screen phone call, comes late in the tale, and is a welcome shift in tone, a relief from the machismo that swamps the movie. Beverly is the film's only even half-drawn female character and appealingly sweet and self-determined, if bland in comparison to the goofing, scrapping dudes back in the baseball house. Linklater has channelled the horny worldview of his leads so well that he repeatedly shoots the college girls at butt-level, and elsewhere sketches them as cheerfully pliant but otherwise vacuous sex objects. It's not long before the overwhelmingly straight-white-maleness of this film palls, and mars what is an otherwise disarmingly perceptive comic triumph.

Overlapping conversation, ready laughs and impressively naturalistic performances from a cast free of A-listers give *Everybody Wants Some!!* the easy charm of Linklater's best work. But if the filmmaker could take the advice of his own prog-rock-obsessed magical dopehead Willoughby and occupy "the space between the notes that they're offering you", he really could have made the 80s radical. **S**

*At first, the college kids, like the corporate rock that kicks off the soundtrack, are so oddly pristine as to seem almost not real*

though it's even more absurd and mercifully brief. The film's most violent and strange moment involves no bodily pain, however, and is also one of its most gorgeous. During a hazy afternoon game of backyard baseball, the team's most aggressive competitor (a lavishly moustachioed Tyler Hoechlin, himself a former college player) substitutes an axe for a bat and slickly bisects a ball in mid-air.

At first, the college kids here, like the cloudless Texan skies and the corporate rock that kicks off the soundtrack, are so oddly pristine as to seem almost not real. To a freshman and woman they have athletic bodies, primary-coloured outfits and white smiles; they find sexual partners with ease and chug free beer without ever getting sick or sloppy. But as the film passes through its four-days-and-nights structure, the surfaces dissolve and the characters start to question the consensus. Markers of difference that were once suppressed or mocked are revealed. 'Being weird' is transformed from a macho insult to a point of pride and, crucially, a way to impress the opposite sex.

The baseball house's chief stoner, a passing-through Californian called Willoughby (Wyatt

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Megan Ellison  
Ginger Sledge  
Richard Linklater  
**Written by**  
Richard Linklater  
**Director of Photography**  
Shane F. Kelly  
**Edited by**  
Sandra Adair  
**Production Designer**  
Bruce Curtis

**Sound Mixer**  
John Pritchett  
**Costume Designer**  
Kari Perkins

©My All  
American, LLC  
**Production Companies**  
Paramount  
Pictures and  
Annapurna Pictures  
present a Detour

Filmproduction  
In association with  
Zenzero Productions  
**Executive Producers**  
Sean Daniel  
John Sloss  
Stephen Feder

**Cast**  
Will Brittain  
Billy Autrey  
Zoey Deutch

Beverly  
Ryan Guzman  
Roper  
Tyler Hoechlin  
McReynolds  
Blake Jenner  
Jake Bradford  
J. Quinton Johnson  
Dale Douglas  
Glen Powell  
Finnegan  
Wyatt Russell  
Willoughby

Austin Amelio  
Nesbit  
Temple Baker  
Plummer  
Tanner Kalina  
Brumley  
Justin Street  
Jay Niles  
Forrest Vickery  
Coma  
Dolby Digital  
In Colour

[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
E1 Films

Southeast Texas University, 1980. Three days before term begins, new student Jake, who is on a baseball scholarship, arrives on campus and moves into the house he will share with his teammates. Driving to a local bar, the housemates meet some female students, one of whom expresses an interest in Jake. After a meeting with their coach, who tells them not to have alcohol in the house or invite women into their bedrooms, they visit a nightclub and then break both rules. The following night they return to the nightclub but have less success attracting dates and are thrown out after a brawl. They visit a country-and-western pub instead. The next day, Jake gets stoned with some of his teammates, including a man called Willoughby, and then runs into a school friend who is a punk. Jake persuades

his new friends to join them at a punk club, after which he leaves a note on the door of the girl he met on the first day. He and the team throw a party at their house.

Next morning, Jake is woken by a phone call from the girl, whose name is Beverly. They meet up and talk, and agree to meet at a party being thrown by performing arts students that night. Jake attends the team's first baseball practice, where they argue over how they should play; the new players then undergo a humiliating hazing ritual. Willoughby is called away from the field and the team later learn that he was fraudulently enrolled. Jake's friends join him and Beverly at the party. Jake and Beverly spend the night together. The next morning, Jake attends his first class, where he immediately falls asleep.



## Heart of a Dog

USA/France 2015

Director: Laurie Anderson

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Laurie Anderson's *Heart of a Dog*, a sort of first-person monologue delivered by the filmmaker while the viewer bobs along on a surface of flowing images, is a piece of work unmistakably steeped in death. The Tibetan Book of the Dead is cited, particularly in association with the last hours of Anderson's friend, the artist Gordon Matta-Clark, which she recounts in detail. Early on, narrating over 8mm home movies, archival footage of trains and a windshield flecked with snowflakes, Anderson, in a cadence defined by unusual placements of emphasis, twists of phrase and a sense of constant gee-whiz discovery, describes the death of her mother, remembering her slipping into a delirium and "talking to the animals that had gathered on the ceiling". At the film's close, Anderson will revisit this scene, which by then takes on a different import. Anderson also describes two near-death childhood experiences and – centre of all this – the 2011 passing of her pet rat terrier Lolabelle, who died at home, having already lost her sight some years before.

At no point in *Heart of a Dog* does Anderson speak about the one death that you might most expect her to talk about, that of her husband Lou Reed, which occurred slightly less than two years before her film premiered at the Telluride festival, and in the middle of its composition. In a sense, she doesn't need to. Reed is the film's structuring absence, never referred to by name but present in Anderson's every frequent, casual use of the pronoun 'we', briefly glimpsed in a bit of home video taken on the beach, and finally providing a coda of sorts when 'Turning Time Around', a song from his 2000 album *Ecstasy*, plays over the closing credits, which include a dedication. A line from Tibetan Buddhist teacher Mingyur Rinpoche that Anderson reads in *Heart of a Dog* – "You need to try to master the ability to feel sad without actually being sad" – also appeared in a tribute essay to Reed that Anderson published in *Rolling Stone* magazine. Even if Reed's name is never spoken aloud, this rumination on death in general can seem to focus on his death in particular, and *Heart of a Dog* might be the companion to Reed's own album-length meditation on the final frontier, 1992's *Magic and Loss*, released the year that he and Anderson began their lives together.

There is nothing in *Heart of a Dog* that quite equals the stark, emotionally raw desolation of that album's 'Cremation – Ashes to Ashes', but then Anderson is seeking quiet acceptance rather than raging against the dying of the light. Several of the preoccupations that run through her work in theatre and music are present in *Heart of a Dog*, including the surveillance state and Tibetan Buddhism, but this prolific polymath has no familiar cinematic style that we can refer back to. Underwritten by the French-German television channel Arte, this is the 69-year-old artist's first feature since the concert movie *Home of the Brave: A Film by Laurie Anderson* 30 years ago, and she approaches the form nearly as an amateur. For the most part, the movie comprises a soundtrack consisting of Anderson's narration and incidental music, predominantly electronic drone and



Un chien and Lou: Lolabelle the rat terrier at the keyboard

violin phrases that circle like birds of prey, as well as occasional bursts of sung song, all laid over a series of images. The soundtrack – the full 75 minutes of it, 'Turning Time Around' and all – has also been released as a standalone spoken-word record, a piece of work that no less a personage than the American rock critic Robert Christgau has called Anderson's "simplest and finest album". If Anderson regards *Heart of a Dog* as a complete artwork in its long-player form – and I believe it is – it's worth exploring what, if anything, the pictorial dimension adds to the sonic.

Early on, the relationship between the aural and visual element is quite straightforward, even fairly literal-minded. When Anderson describes her dog learning piano at the behest of a trainer, we see Lolabelle yipping and pawing at a keyboard. When Anderson speaks of the end of Lolabelle's life, we see deathbed photographs of the pet with her grey muzzle and bloodshot, sightless eyes. After Lolabelle dies, her passage through the bardo – a kind of waiting room described in Tibetan Buddhism, in which the dead await their rebirth – is illustrated by Anderson's own paintings. When Anderson speaks of Lolabelle's first owners, a divorced couple, or the veterinarians who advised putting her down in her final illness, or the doctors who

told Anderson she wouldn't walk again after a childhood accident, this material is accompanied by 're-enactments' that are rather close to clip-art generic. There is an attempt to represent, via GoPro-shot footage, the ankle-level POV of Lolabelle plunging along the streets of the West Village, along with other foreign perspectives, such as those of the surveillance state's million eyes or the vast catalogue of images, gathered in data-storage facilities like those maintained by Iron Mountain Inc, in which Anderson sees a digital afterlife for all of us. She also summons up analogue ghosts: the 8mm home movies of the Anderson family play out in spectral slow motion, seen through a writhing layer of chemical blotches and scratches that initially give the impression of being flaws on the film itself, though as they persist over transitional blackouts and new footage taken on digital video, it becomes obvious that this is a postproduction effect.

As the film goes along, Anderson begins to abandon the strictly illustrative approach, and her employment of textured, partition-like layering effects increases. Certain images that first appear by themselves – the crack-seamed "huge gold void" of Goya's *The Dog*, a pane of glass or a windshield beaded with rain or wet snow, the sky viewed between the overarching bare limbs of





trees – reappear, piled atop one another or atop newly introduced images. As these images recur, Anderson's narration also loops back, returning to pick up subjects dropped earlier on, when her attention seemed to be diverted elsewhere. These switchbacks in turn lead to the reprisal of musical themes – it should come as no surprise that the

*As 'Heart of the Dog' plays through, its junky, rinky-tink imagery acquires depth and weight, even elegance*



You hum it, I'll play it: Lolabelle in performance, assisted by trainer Elisabeth Weiss

film's overall almost palindromic construction feels like that of a concept album. Anderson's narration ends, very nearly as it began, with her recalling her mother's death, an event she initially finds herself unable to mourn, unlike the passing of Lolabelle. ("We" – there's that *we* again – "had learned to love Lola as she loved us, with a tenderness we didn't know we had.") Anderson attempts to address this failure through a Buddhist exercise called the 'Mother Meditation', which asks in part that one "imagine that you've been everyone's mother, and they've been yours". This idea connects to the film's opening, in which Anderson – who appears briefly in this section as a rotoscoped pen-and-ink cartoon – recounts a dream of giving birth to Lolabelle after having the dog stitched into her stomach. Anderson's explanation of the Mother Meditation is followed immediately by a reprise of the same tune, 'The Lake', that accompanied the recounting of the dream, this time in a version with vocals.

All of which is to say that the apparently free-associative peregrinations of Anderson's voiceover are anything but random, and as she weaves together anecdote, autobiography, current events and demotic philosophy, the same themes recur in new guises: love, loss, memory, sorrow, survival and the complexities of telling the really real way that a thing happened. As *Heart of the Dog* plays through, its junky, rinky-tink imagery acquires a sense of greater depth and weight, even elegance – the expression of a story that discovers itself in the telling. 🐾

#### Credits and Synopsis

##### Produced by

Dan Janvey  
Laurie Anderson

##### Written by

Laurie Anderson  
**Cinematography**  
Laurie Anderson  
Toshiaki Ozawa  
Joshua Zucker-Pluda

##### Edited by

Melody London  
Katherine Nolfi

##### Score

Laurie Anderson

##### Sound Mixer

Mario McNulty

##### Drawings/

Animation  
Laurie Anderson

©Canal Street  
Communications,  
Inc.

##### Production

**Companies**  
A Canal Street  
Communications  
production in  
association with  
ARTE France – La  
Lucerne and  
Field Office

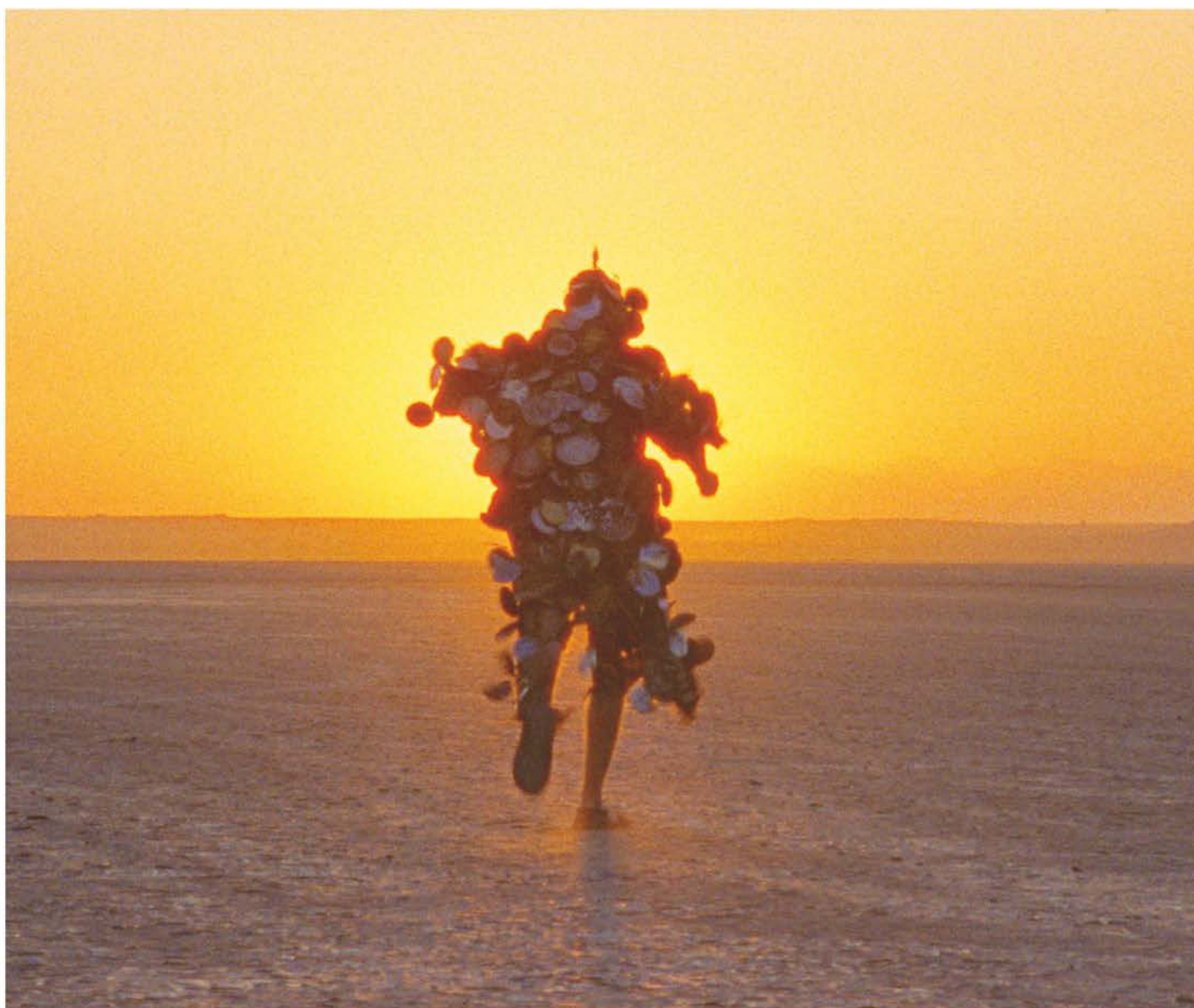
A film by Laurie  
Anderson

**In Colour and  
Black & White**  
[178:1]

**Distributor**  
Dogwoof

A film presenting the life of Laurie Anderson, from her girlhood in Illinois to the present day. As the film begins, Anderson narrates over a series of illustrations depicting a dream in which she gives birth to her beloved pet dog Lolabelle. Anderson's voiceover continues throughout the film, although the images we see become increasingly obliquely related to what is being discussed. Anderson recalls the delirious words of her dying mother, her "sky-worshipping" youth in the Midwest, and leaving New York City with Lolabelle in the aftermath of 9/11 to wander the hills of northern California. Anderson discusses the rise of the surveillance state in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, and the phenomenon of phosphenes, otherwise known as 'prisoner's cinema' – the illusory lights we see with our eyes closed. We learn more of Lolabelle's life story, from the puppy farm where she was born and the home of her first owners, to living with Anderson in New York's West Village. We learn of Lolabelle's blindness, which leads to her taking up painting and music at the behest of her trainer Elisabeth Weiss, and finally to her illness, eventual death in 2011 and afterlife in the 'bardo' of Tibetan Buddhism. Anderson recounts crucial events from her own youth, including an incident in which she broke her back at the swimming pool; she also recalls saving her twin brothers from drowning, an event she revisits and takes comfort from following the death of her mother. "Is it a pilgrimage?" she asks in conclusion. "Towards what?"





The tin man: *The Sky Trembles and the Earth Is Afraid...* is a visually sumptuous engagement with colonialism, the act of travel and authenticity

## The Sky Trembles and the Earth Is Afraid and the Two Eyes Are Not Brothers

United Kingdom 2015

Director: Ben Rivers

**Reviewed by Violet Lucca**

**Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist**

At once a continuation of his interest in landscape and solitude and a significant departure from their usually peaceful depiction, Ben Rivers's *The Sky Trembles and the Earth Is Afraid and the Two Eyes Are Not Brothers* is a visually sumptuous engagement with colonialism, the act of travel and authenticity. Always ambivalent and frequently unsettling, the tensions in the film are never moralised and refuse resolution, and instead exist, like two eyes, directly next to each other.

Originally part of an installation at the old BBC Television Centre in London's White City (projected on to defunct drama sets), the film consists of two sections that seamlessly transition from one to the other. The first takes its cue from Pere Portabella's *Vampire Cuadecuc* (1971) – which was shot on the set of Jesús Franco's *Count Dracula* – as Rivers documents the filming of Oliver

Laxe's *Las Mimosas* last year in Morocco's Atlas Mountains, a landscape littered with the props of past sword-and-sandal productions. Privileging moments in between shooting, Rivers shows the actors (all locals) waiting for their next scene, staring into the distance lost in thought or silently walking to their mark; at other times, softly droning electronic music fades in and out over the native sound. (Rivers's original installation also included similar moments from the set of Shezad Dawood's sci-fi-infused *Towards the Possible Film*, which was also shot in the Moroccan Sahara.)

Despite the hypnotic nature of the proceedings, this section of *The Sky Trembles* nicely conveys



Hostage crisis: *The Sky Trembles...*

the extremely unromantic experience of being on a film set: the actors flub their lines; technical problems cause delays; how much of what we're watching will make it into the final cut (if anything, even from a different angle) isn't apparent. Yet the 'hurry up and wait' that Rivers documents also contains a sense of unease: are the men growing listless because they're tired of doing the same thing over and over again, or are they deeply frustrated with the entire project and about to walk off? Is this production – where the point of the scenes being shot remains obfuscated – headed towards disaster, or has it already bottomed out and we're just witnessing its last gasps?

The tension between progress – the standard chaos of film production – and inertia eventually culminates in the moment when we see Laxe shooting in a crowded area close to the local town, after which he drives off (blasting out heavy metal, perhaps a nod to Rivers's equally trance- and nature-obsessed *A Spell to Ward Off the Darkness*, 2013) to drink tea at a rooftop café. From here, *The Sky Trembles* turns into an adaptation of Paul Bowles's 1947 short story 'A Distant Episode'. Taking the place of the French linguist of the original, who's searching for novelty camel-udder boxes, Laxe abandons his shoot, follows a man wearing a black hood



into the desert, is ambushed by bandits, has his tongue cut out, is outfitted in a suit of tin cans, gets reduced to a feral state and trained to dance on command, is sold as a curiosity to another man, suddenly regains a sense of self after seeing a bouncing DVD logo and then runs screaming into the desert towards the setting sun. (In line with the film's overall mystique, this final image – the only footage taken outside Morocco – was shot in a section of the Mojave Desert miraculously called Mirage Lake.)

While Rivers preserves the punishing nastiness of 'A Distant Episode', he takes subtle measures to differentiate the potential interpretations of his retelling. Though both Laxe and the professor of the source material are chasing after something unique and specific to Morocco, the first half of the film demonstrates that what Laxe is after isn't an indulgent orientalist fantasy, and that his search for authenticity is participatory, fair-minded and open-ended; there is no predetermined outcome that's burning to be fulfilled. Instead, Laxe's approach has a closer affinity with Bowles's own hash-influenced writings and his translations of Mohammed Mrabet's stories. (Such associations were more apparent in the installation, which included footage of Mrabet telling stories directly to camera.) Or at least the official version of Bowles's legacy: it has been suggested that he attributed some of Mrabet's work to himself. The question of authorship is a common problem, too, when dealing with the collaborative nature of filmmaking, large or small. It's easy to credit the director for something that could have been created independently by the cinematographer, grip and/or actors. When traditional below-the-line roles are more fluid, as they frequently are in hybrid films – an actor is also a writer and a real person having their life documented – the situation becomes even muddier.

Disregarding directorial intent, the question becomes: is this collaboration or parasitism? *The Sky Trembles* references earlier forms of the fusion of documentary and fiction, and cinema itself. The actors' blank expressions in the first half, separated from Laxe's narrative and intentions, are a Kuleshovian invitation for the audience to project meaning and emotion on to them, an act that is at the core of othering and orientalist but also of watching film. Given the long periods



Behold a pale horse: Shakib Ben Omar, one of the actors in Oliver Laxe's *Las Mimosas*

of silence in the first half of *The Sky Trembles*, as well as its geographical location, there's a connection to early exoticist travelogues, a type of cinema that was similarly not necessarily driven by narrative but rather by a sense of place and mood, where those who happened to be standing in front of the camera performed for it (usually a version of themselves) or returned the gaze. (But then, it's not wholly antiquated: this part of Morocco is still used by all kinds of international film crews to depict something far-flung, untouched and inhospitable.)

*As one bandit cackles after putting Laxe into the tin-can suit, 'You came here and circled around trouble. You looked for it until you found it'*

By drawing attention to the loop between documentary, hybrid documentary film practice and the ethics that underpin them, Laxe's punishment in the fictional portion of *The Sky Trembles* is both something he brings on himself and also a violent repayment of a debt created by those who came before him. As one bandit cackles after putting Laxe into the tin-can suit, "You came here and circled around trouble. You looked for it until you found it." But what is the trouble? The ruthlessness of the bandits, or Laxe's filmmaking practice? In many circles, this hybrid, collaborative mode of film production is touted as the non-problematic solution to ethnographic filmmaking, or simply making film outside one's immediate experience; by employing it to tell a tale about the fundamental nastiness of human nature, *The Sky Trembles* questions the certainty of that position.

This sense of doubt and unease runs up against the film's views of Morocco, which never fail to be undeniably beautiful. As a masterful creator of images, Rivers captures mountainsides, grassy valleys and ochre dunes without getting lost in postcard clichés. Carrying the thread that runs throughout Bowles's *oeuvre*, these shots of Morocco are both alluring because of their attractiveness and threatening by virtue of how inhospitable the weather is: you can feel the dust and heat of the desert and the cold and wet of the Atlas Mountains' snow-capped peaks. Just as in his 2007 work *Sjødal* (which used Norwegian author Knut Hamsun's writings), 2008's *Ah, Liberty!* or 2011's *Two Years at Sea*, Rivers preserves an intense intimacy with all his subjects in every shot, showing the bandits falling asleep, waking up, eating and laughing. Effortlessly establishing the daily rhythm of their lives on the road (with Laxe tied to a horse, trailing behind), such moments give this fantastical, barbarous tale a sense of humanity and realism. Though Rivers isn't asking you to identify with the bandits or with Laxe, they remain men rather than ghoulish abstractions – a move that's far more ambitious than anything you'll find in the vast majority of wordier, more complicated narrative films. **S**

## Credits and Synopsis

### Producer

Jacqui Davies

### Written by

Ben Rivers

### Director of

Photography

Ben Rivers

### Editors

Ben Rivers

Benjamin Murguet

### Set Designer

Ben Rivers

### Original Music

Carles Santos

### Supervising

Sound Editor

Philippe Ciampi

### Costume Designer

Julie Verges

©Ben Rivers,

Artangel, The British

### Film Institute

Production

Companies

Artangel and BFI

present an Artangel

production

Made with the

support of Artangel

International Circle

- Special Angels and

The Company of

Angels, Arts Council

England, BBC Radio 4

Originally

commissioned

through Open

2013 by Artangel

in association with

BBC Radio 4

Artangel, Arts Council

England, BBC Radio

4, the Whitworth

- The University

of Manchester

### Executive Producers

Michael Morris

Cressida Hubbard

Lizzie Francke

### Cast

Oliver Laxe

### Dolby Digital

In Colour

35mm Prints by

Cinema Printing

Company

[L66:1]

### Part-subtitled

### Distributor

Independent

Cinema Office

Morocco, the present. Three Mercedes and an ATV drive through the desert at dusk. Director Oliver Laxe reads to camera a passage from Paul Bowles's short story 'He of the Assembly'. Three men in traditional Moroccan clothing walk through the desert, which is eventually revealed to be the set of the film that Laxe is shooting. An old man at a café performs a magic trick. Things start to go wrong on the set of Laxe's film; he gets into his truck and drives away. Laxe sees a man in a black hood, and follows him into the desert as it grows dark. He is hit on the head from behind with a rock and has his tongue cut out; a stray dog eats the tongue. Bandits wrap Laxe in canvas and leave him baking on

the ground while they go inside a house. Later, they put a suit of tin cans on him and tie him to a horse. They march through the desert. When they stop for lunch, the bandits order Laxe to dance, and laugh as he does so. They travel around for many days, and slowly Laxe's dancing improves. The bandits sell Laxe to a man with a large house. Laxe's new owner takes him to a courtyard with a group of men with drums who start singing. Laxe doesn't dance. His owner tries to return him to the bandits and is stabbed. Laxe wanders around the house. He comes across a TV with a bouncing DVD logo on it and starts yelling. He runs outside, past two policemen and into the desert, towards the setting sun.



# Batman v Superman Dawn of Justice

USA 2016  
Director: Zack Snyder  
Certificate 12A 151m 27s

## Reviewed by Kim Newman

The notion that Batman and Superman exist in the same fictional universe dates back to 1940, when the heroes – both published by National Comics (later DC) – appeared together on the cover of the one-off *New York World's Fair Comics*, which led to the long-running *World's Finest Comics* title. At first Superman and Batman (and Robin) only shared the covers, but they eventually teamed up to fight evil, becoming – along with Wonder Woman – the core of DC's Justice League of America, which added the Flash, Green Lantern and others to the roster of Super Friends, as a 1970s animated TV series called them. If Superman and Batman fought on a cover, there was always an explanation (alien mind-control, a hoax to fool a mutual enemy), and the playground debate over which hero was toughest was left open. In 1986, Frank Miller's influential miniseries *The Dark Knight Returns* represented the former friends as bitter enemies (though their fight to a standstill had no clear winner); ever since, even mainstream depictions of the characters have played up their antagonism.

Which brings us to *Batman v Superman*, the latest attempt by Warner Bros to make a franchise out of properties it obtained by buying DC Comics outright – the obvious model being the Marvel film universe's ascent to global monolith status. (Actually, Marvel has its brand on two separate universes, with Disney and Fox as partners.) Previous Superman and Batman films confined themselves to throwaway jokes ("The circus is halfway to Metropolis by now," from 1995's *Batman Forever*) – though there have been team-ups in animated and Lego versions of DC properties.

Setting aside the misstep of *Green Lantern* (2011), Warner had director Zack Snyder and comics specialist David S. Goyer (of the *Blade* and *Dark Knight* franchises) seed a universe with *Man of Steel* (2013), a dour effort yoked to the 'New 52' comics reboot of Superman (itself wound up before this sequel could arrive). As

if building a new, simplistic frame for the fight scene from issue #4 of *The Dark Knight Returns* weren't enough, *Batman v Superman* is required to introduce Wonder Woman (Gal Gadot, aptly doing wonders with thin characterisation and drab armour) plus the Flash, Aquaman and Cyborg (a character DC has vainly plugged on multiple platforms but who stubbornly refuses to catch on). Rebooted characters compete with ghost versions who seemed to be here only five minutes ago: Jesse Eisenberg's Lex Luthor is a maniac Mark Zuckerberg whose evil grace note is sacrificing his own devoted assistant to a suicide bomber just to make Superman look bad, while Ben Affleck is a grimly bulked-up Bruce Wayne with a mother hang-up, swayed from xenocide only because Clark Kent's ma and his share the same name.

It's all too much – and littered with in-film trailers for as-yet-unmade, perhaps unmakeable spin-offs. A vision of a future tyrant Superman (derived from the computer game *Injustice: Gods Among Us*) is predicated on things which don't happen in the climax, while Marvel-style hints suggest a Big Space Bad is coming to bother the whole Justice League (blink-and-miss Flash/Ezra Miller and Aquaman/Jason Momoa included).

The title bout isn't even resolved since the Batman v Superman fight is abandoned before a clear winner emerges – as the heroes, along with Wonder Woman, are distracted in the third act, which is a précis of the 1991 'Death of Superman' storyline (once developed by Tim Burton as a film in itself). The lengthy, drab, monotonous fight-and-destruction spectacle of *Man of Steel* carries over here, and Batman's tooled-up, homicidal vengeance-mania goes even beyond the off-model, murderous Superman to make these heroes as unredeemable as the Punisher. This is a superhero film that opens and closes with funerals and requires the world's finest detective and an avatar of truth and justice to batter each other (and everyone else) senseless for two and a half hours. **S**

## Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Charles Roven Deborah Snyder	<b>Music</b> Hans Zimmer	<b>@Warner Bros.</b> Entertainment Inc. and RatPac-Dune Entertainment LLC
<b>Written by</b> Chris Terrio David S. Goyer Based on characters from DC Comics.	<b>Sound Design and Supervision</b> Scott Hecker	<b>Production Companies</b> Warner Bros. Pictures presents in association with RatPac-Dune Entertainment an Atlas Entertainment, Cruel and Unusual production A Zack Snyder film
<b>Costumes</b> <b>Designed by</b> Michael Wilkinson	<b>Visual Effects</b> MPC Scanline Weta Digital Limited Double Negative Method Studios Shade Perception	<b>Executive Producers</b> Christopher Nolan Emma Thomas Wesley Coller
<b>Director of Photography</b> Larry Fong	<b>Stunt Co-ordinator</b> Tim Rigby	
<b>Edited by</b> David Brenner		
<b>Production Designer</b> Patrick Tatopoulos		

After a destructive battle between Superman and General Zod in Metropolis, billionaires Bruce Wayne (secretly the vigilante Batman) and Lex Luthor are worried by the threat posed by Superman (secretly reporter Clark Kent). Batman uses the mineral kryptonite to manufacture anti-Superman weapons. Luthor kidnaps Clark's adoptive mother Martha and threatens to murder her unless Superman kills

Batman. The heroes battle until Diana Prince (Wonder Woman) and Lois Lane (Clark's girlfriend) intervene. Batman rescues Martha, while Superman and Wonder Woman fight Doomsday, a monster that Luthor has created using Kryptonian technology. Superman is apparently killed defeating Doomsday. Luthor is jailed. Batman and Wonder Woman resolve to unite with other meta-humans to protect the planet.

<b>Geoff Johns</b> David S. Goyer Steven Mnuchin Benjamin Melniker	<b>Laurence Fishburne</b> Perry White <b>Jeremy Irons</b> Alfred <b>Holly Hunter</b> Senator Finch <b>Gal Gadot</b> Diana Prince, 'Wonder Woman' <b>Michael Shannon</b> General Zod	<b>In Colour</b> [2.35:1]
<b>Cast</b> <b>Ben Affleck</b> Bruce Wayne, 'Batman' <b>Henry Cavill</b> Clark Kent, 'Superman' <b>Amy Adams</b> Lois Lane <b>Jesse Eisenberg</b> Lex Luthor <b>Diane Lane</b> Martha Kent	<b>Some screenings presented in 3D</b>	<b>Distributor</b> Warner Bros. Pictures International (UK)
	<b>[uncredited]</b> Ezra Miller the Flash Jason Momoa Aquaman <b>Dolby Atmos</b>	

# Breaking the Bank

United Kingdom 2014  
Director: Vadim Jean

## Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Taking the approach of a light 80s comedy – complete with the threat of a Japanese takeover – and applying it to an even flimsier commentary on the financial crisis, *Breaking the Bank* goes bust in the laugh department. Kelsey Grammer's turn as Sir Charles Bunbury, a dopey British toff who doesn't understand basic financial concepts yet is in charge of his frigid wife's 200-year-old investment bank, almost instantly goes from cartoonish to grating. But then, the non-plummy players are just as insufferable, such as Graham (Danny Morgan), a nerdy city type who can't get it up, or Nick (Mathew Horne), a laddish trader in pinstripes who deliberately sabotages Charles in a bid for more power and briefly does slanty-eyes while discussing short-selling the Japanese. (The actual Japanese characters don't fare much better in the lazy stereotype department – Piper Laurie as Mr Tojamura in *Twin Peaks* had more nuance and knowingness.)

Even though it successfully slips in harsh truths about how banking works and breaks down some well-worn dirty-but-legal trading practices, it would be wrong to read too much into this completely uncynical piece of fluff. But if you did, you might begin by asking why it is that the people who haven't inherited their wealth and ascended to a place of power are the baddies, and the unspeakably lazy, incompetent upper classes are the ones with good hearts? **S**

## Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Jake Seal Roger Devlin	<b>Executive Producers</b> Jonathan Evans Louise Devlin	<b>[1.85:1]</b>
<b>Written by</b> Roger Devlin Additional writing by Vadim Jean, Stephen Keyworth Additional material by James McIlwraith, Tom Swanston	<b>Cast</b> <b>Kelsey Grammer</b> Sir Charles Bunbury <b>Tamsin Greig</b> Penelope Bunbury <b>Mathew Horne</b> Nick Freeman <b>Pearce Quigley</b> Oscar <b>Sonya Cassidy</b> Annabel Bunbury <b>Togo Igawa</b> Akira Nakamura <b>Danny Morgan</b> Graham Sneddon <b>Julie Dray</b> Sophie Fleury <b>Andrew Sachs</b> Jenkins <b>John Michael Higgins</b> Richard Grinding	<b>Distributor</b> Altive Films
<b>Director of Photography</b> Oliver Curtis		
<b>Editor</b> Jason Gourson		
<b>Production Designer</b> Caroline Greville-Morris		
<b>Composer</b> David Buckley		
<b>Production Sound Mixer</b> Julian Willson		
<b>Costume Designer</b> Scott Langridge		
<b>©BTB SPV Productions</b>	<b>In Colour</b>	

London, present day. Sir Charles Bunbury receives offers from Interglobal chairman Richard Grinding and Honshu chairman Mr Nakamura to buy his bank, Tuftons. Nick, an up-and-coming trader at Tuftons, recommends that Charles invest in Nurgistan natural gas. As a result, Charles loses everything. While about to jump off a bridge, he meets Oscar, a tramp who helps him devise a plan to trick Tuftons into short-selling Honshu stock. The short-selling fails, and Charles gets Tuftons and his wife back.



## Cabin Fever

USA 2015  
Director: Travis Z

### Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

Prior to embarking on this monumentally baffling remake of Eli Roth's 2002 debut feature, director Travis Zariwny claims to have watched the slapdash original – hardly a horror Urtext – 50 times. He plainly overdid it. This slavish update is less reboot, more rote appropriation – with minor narrative and tonal tweaks – of what came before. Roth's film, a goofy, knowing mishmash of *Evil Dead*, *Deliverance* and sundry other backwoods nightmares, at least boasted the novelty of its primary threat being not homicidal or possessed humans but rather a voracious flesh-eating virus. In the 14 years since, genre variants even more meta and parodic (*The Cabin in the Woods*, *Tucker & Dale vs. Evil*, *Baghead*) have come and gone, not to mention a sequel (disowned by its director Ti West) and a prequel to *Cabin Fever*. If returning to the source suggests a chronic paucity of fresh ideas, then it's made explicit by Zariwny's tracing-paper treatment, which brings very little that's new to the material. Compared with say, the surprisingly effective *Evil Dead* revision of 2013 – which at least had a distance of three decades to work with – this is a carbon copy as pointless as it is cynical.

Roth himself is credited as an executive producer, perhaps indicating how his profile as a self-aggrandising schlock satirist has waned since the mild notoriety of the *Hostel* films and following a series of duds (cannibal ordeal *The Green Inferno*, TV's *Hemlock Grove*, erotic psycho-thriller *Knock Knock*). Zariwny, a veteran production designer and cameraman, proves a placidly obedient pair of hands in reshooting Roth and Randy Pearlstein's script. Even the odd deviation has no original value – an introductory aerial shot is a limp rip-off of *The Shining*'s opening sequence, complete with a mangled version of the 'Dies Irae' from Wendy Carlos's score. As in many of Roth's features, a cosseted, blithely ignorant bunch of youngsters come horribly unstuck in an alien environment – in this case, a quintet of horny city teens make their ill-fated way to an Alabama wilderness populated by bug-eyed rednecks, where they each succumb to some grisly waterborne bacteria. There are slight alterations and omissions in this version:



Flesh mob: *Cabin Fever*

the throwaway wackiness of Roth's original has been dampened, as have some of its more obnoxious attempts at humour (gamer nerd Bert no longer hunts squirrels because "they're gay"). On the cosmetic front, smartphones proliferate – a detail that factors into a risible selfie-related coda. Otherwise, we may as well still be in 2002.

For all the original film's flaws, Roth was at least adept at eliciting squirms from his gruesome set pieces of necrotic panic. If anything, Zariwny serves up more viscera but to diminished effect. Death scenes are elaborated on and given a crueller edge, mainly to the detriment of the female characters. Perhaps conscious of this, the remake switches the gender of the hedonistic local deputy who comes into contact with the cabin dwellers. But again, it's a rejig that has next to no impact. Odder still is an abbreviated denouement that inexplicably sidesteps the original's bleak conclusion.

Zariwny, with his long technical background, at least ensures the film looks accomplished enough on that front – the Oregon locations, doubling for Alabama, are capably utilised. But adequate mounting can't ultimately compensate for the project's staggering redundancy. Roth's *Cabin Fever* wasn't exactly a standard to begin with; this iteration is a singularly unadventurous cover version. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Directed by

Travis Z  
[i.e. Travis Zariwny]

#### Produced by

Evan Astrowsky  
Christopher Lemole  
Tim Zajaros

#### Screenplay

Eli Roth  
Randy Pearlstein

#### Story

Eli Roth

#### Director of Photography

Gavin Kelly

#### Editor

Kyle Tekiela

#### Production Designer

Melanie Rein

#### Music

Kevin Riepl

#### Sound Designers

Christian Dwigings

Chris Trent

#### Costume Designer

Marjorie Sortman

©Cabin Fever  
Productions, LLC

#### Production Companies

Eli Roth presents

a Dragonfly

Entertainment

production in

association with

Contend, Armory

Films, Pelican Point

Media and Elevated

A film by Travis Z

#### Executive Producers

Eli Roth

Cassian Elwes

Jerry Fruchtman

Peter Fruchtman

#### Cast

Gage Golightly

Karen

#### Matthew Daddario

Jeff

Samuel Davis

Paul

Nadine Crocker

Marcy

Dustin Ingram

Bert

Louise Linton

Deputy Winston

#### In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

Arrow Films

US, present day. Five friends – Karen, Paul, Bert, Marcy and Jeff – make their way to a remote cabin retreat. En route, they have an unsettling encounter with locals at a roadside store. While out hunting, Bert accidentally shoots a man whose flesh is rotting. Later that night, the infected man visits the cabin. When he damages the party's car, they set him on fire and he vanishes. A police deputy, Winston, agrees to call a tow truck for the car, but it never appears. When Karen shows signs of infection, she is quarantined in an outhouse. Marcy is next to succumb, and is later savaged and killed by an infected dog. Managing to start the car, Bert drives to the roadside store. Realising that he's infected, the locals try to kill him. Chased back to the cabin, Bert kills his assailants before dying himself. Paul deduces that the infection originates from the nearby reservoir. He returns to help Karen, but kills her when he sees that she is beyond rescue. Now infected, Paul flees into the woods but becomes lost and dies. Jeff, delighting that he has seemingly escaped unscathed, is shot dead by Winston.

## The Call Up

United Kingdom 2015  
Director: Charles Barker

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

Ever since *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932), in which a big-game hunter became the prey of sadistic rivals, gamers of various kinds have been put in situations where ritualised pastimes of pretend danger and violence become real threats to their lives. In the era of arcade games, *TRON* (1982) and *The Last Starfighter* (1984) featured, respectively, a self-aware game that sucked in its creator and a game designed by aliens as a recruiting tool for a space war. Descendants of these films feature murderous paintball (RPG, 2013) or VR games (David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*, 1999). Few are as on the nose as *The Call Up*, in which eight high-scorers (actually, seven high-scorers and a ringer) eagerly try out a new virtual-reality system that turns out to be designed to kill losers. It's a simple enough hook, though what benefits are offered to winners beyond a cash prize are harder to discern.

Debuting writer-director Charles Barker makes good use of the simple notion of re-dressing sets – the irony being that the featureless, furnitureless, all-white empty offices representing the real world look more like a virtual environment than the grubby, rubble-strewn, trap-littered version created inside the game. The sleek suits and white plastic armour and helmets – with toy weapons – are nicely designed and subtly ominous, and also more imaginative and otherworldly than the standard fatigues and terrorists of the multi-player first-person shooter-game environment. Barker goes with the Agatha Christie device of the gathering of strangers with secrets, and a decent cast manage to sketch in archetypes – with an assortment of mid-Atlantic accents keeping the setting non-specific – before the inevitable business of bonding and betrayal sets in.

The most obvious dig at gamer types is Dougie McMeekin's chubby couch-potato superstar, pitched nervously into something like real conflict and begging for a pause facility in the middle of a firefight. Tom Benedict Knight's gym-pumped, embittered, egoistical misogynist might be taken as a caricature of the anti-feminist 'gamergate' movement – though he also fits the horror-movie stock character of 'troublemaking asshole' whose every statement and action make a tense situation worse. The notional leads, Max Deacon's Carl (a grieving loner) and Morfydd Clark's Shelly (a standard tough chick), get less to work with, while Ali Cook's posh Edward simply bides his time until the finale.



Game face: Parker Sawyers



**➔** In stories like this, an explanation of why the deadly game is happening is usually less important than the way it plays out; here, the thin rationale is one of the basics of the genre – an obsessive, thrill-seeking villain after the manner of *The Most Dangerous Game's* Count Zaroff. The action scenes of *The Call Up* are mostly conventional duck-and-shoot business, with only one clever bit of cheating as Carl takes advantage of the rules of the game to trick the program into killing one of the other competitors. It may be down to budget that the baddies of the game are anonymous terrorists rather than (say) aliens or zombies, though that doesn't quite excuse how basic the challenges posed are – a bomb is deactivated by hitting a big red button rather than solving a puzzle, for instance. More effective are games frills such as a medpac that cures fatal wounds if administered in time – though of course, there aren't enough to go around. The real-world coda isn't as mind-altering as that of *eXistenZ* but does reinforce the paradox of all deadly gaming fiction: that fantasy violence is unhealthy but genre requirements mean it should at least be exciting and ultimately satisfying. **Ⓢ**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Matthew James  
Wilkinson  
**Written by**  
John Giwa-Amu  
Charles Barker  
Additional writing by  
Damian Fitzsimmons  
**Director of  
Photography**  
John Lee  
**Editor**  
Tommy Boulding  
**Production  
Designer**  
Richard Campling  
**Music**  
Tom Raybould  
**Sound Design**  
Paul McFadden  
Jon Joyce  
**Costume Designer**  
Lindsey Archer  
**Visual Effects**  
Bait Studio  
**Stunt Co-  
ordinators**  
Levan Doran  
Vincent Keane

©The Call Up Limited  
**Production  
Companies**

Stigma Films and  
Red and Black  
Films present  
in association  
with Creative  
England, Marzipan  
Productions, Pont  
Neuf Productions,  
Altitude Film Sales  
**Executive  
Producers**  
Alan Martin  
Richard Holmes

**Cast**  
**Parker Sawyers**  
Andre  
**Max Deacon**  
Carl  
**Morfydd Clark**  
Shelly  
**Ali Cook**  
Edward  
**Tom Benedict**  
Knight  
Marco  
**Christopher Obi**  
sergeant  
**Boris Ler**  
Zahid  
**Duggie McMeekin**  
Adam

**Adriana Randall**  
Taylor  
**Greg Kolpakchi**  
tortured terrorist  
**Jaimi Barbakoff**  
Wanda

**In Colour**

**Distributor**  
Altitude Film  
Entertainment

Eight online gamers – Carl, Andre, Adam, Zahid, Edward, Marco, Shelly and Taylor – are invited by a mysterious company to beta-test a virtual reality game system. In an empty office building, they put on sophisticated motion-capture suits, which give them the illusion of being soldiers deployed in an urban war zone; they have to fight their way through levels represented by floors of the building. When Andre, an ex-soldier, is killed in the game, his helmet – which can't be removed – administers a fatal electric shock. The gamers realise that they have been selected as much for their lack of family ties as for their gaming ability, and that they are unlikely to survive the test. Shelly, Carl and Edward team up to try to beat the game. Marco goes rogue and murders Taylor, prompting Carl to use a cheat – tampering with Marco's helmet – to get the game to kill him. After most of the gamers have been killed, Shelly realises that Edward is the tycoon behind the test.

## Chicken

United Kingdom 2014  
Director: Joe Stephenson  
Certificate 15 85m 58s

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Here's an instance of an actor who's portraying a mentally challenged character and doesn't treat the whole thing as a shameless display piece. Perhaps it helped that Scott Chambers had already played the role on stage, but he so utterly inhabits troubled, neglected 15-year-old Richard that his extraordinary performance carries the prime emotional charge in this modestly scaled yet highly sympathetic portrait of the socially and emotionally disenfranchised. With their parents out of the picture and social services nowhere to be seen, Richard and his curiously named, somewhat volatile older brother Polly (Morgan Watkins) live almost off-grid in a rundown caravan pitched in the grounds of a Norfolk country house, siphoning off electricity from the long-absent owners. Polly, a reluctant protector who knows that his outsider status is standing in the way of any job prospects or hope of sexual satisfaction, earns cash stripping wire at a nearby scrapyard, but it's obvious that his current situation offers no long-term future for him or his brother. Sensibly, first-time feature director Joe Stephenson gives Richard the bulk of the screen time early on, introducing us to a lonely boy who dresses roadkill animals in a mini-theatre he's set up in the corner of a nearby barn, whose closest confidante is a chicken called Fiona, and who somehow maintains a sunny outlook while skivvying for his ungrateful brother. Such childlike innocence is often tricky to convey without it seeming like a writer's too-cute construct, yet Chambers has absorbed the role to such a degree that he simply radiates it, through slightly skewed body language and often tangential conversational gambits. Still, we also see his quiet, doubt-shadowed moments too, particularly in one scene where he's eating by himself in the twilight, his anxious expression betraying an understanding that the world isn't always generous to those so nakedly vulnerable. The two other main characters effectively play off him. Watkins's Polly is permanently on a short



**No future:** Scott Chambers, Yasmin Paige

fuse, creating a simmering tension that sustains interest through the somewhat deliberate pacing, delivering a picture of a rugged youth aspiring to traditional images of masculinity – and tragically imposing them on poor Richard – yet also hugely frustrated by his own social inadequacies and testing family circumstances. Yasmin Paige's ditsy middle-class interloper at first seems like a really crass dramatic device but, counterintuitively, Richard's plight brings out a sense of responsibility in her that perhaps surprises even her. The script, which *Weekend* co-star Chris New adapted from Freddie Machin's original play, wobbles a bit over their initial meet-cute, and doesn't always convince when covering Polly's unlikely-seeming employability, yet our overriding concern for Richard – and the easy rapport between Stephenson's camera and the cast – sustains the momentum. Unfortunately, there's a big reveal during the climactic confrontation which is so extreme it rather knocks the whole story off balance. But for most of the way this is a touching, worthwhile low-budget British offering, showcasing a tremendous turn from Chambers, which one hopes will put him on track for even greater things. **Ⓢ**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Joe Stephenson  
Tina Galovic  
**Screenplay**  
Chris New  
Based on a play by  
Freddie Machin  
**Screenstory/  
Additional Writing**  
Freddie Machin  
**Director of  
Photography**  
Eben Bolter  
**Editors**  
Joe Stephenson  
Charlie Lyne  
**Production Designer**  
Chris Barber  
**Original Score  
& Music**  
Tom Linden  
**Sound Designer**  
Wayne Reay  
**Costume Designer**  
Miranda King

©B Chicken Ltd  
**Production  
Companies**

B Good Picture  
Company presents in  
association with Bold  
Turtle Productions  
A film by Joe  
Stephenson  
**Executive Producers**  
Cosmin Ion  
Paul Fischer  
Enfys Dickinson  
Daniel Pickering

**Cast**  
**Yasmin Paige**  
Annabel  
**Morgan Watkins**  
Polly  
**Scott Chambers**  
Richard  
**Kirsty Besterman**  
Mrs Rickson  
**Stuart Keil**  
Mr Rickson

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
**Distributor**

B Good Picture  
Company Ltd

Rural Norfolk, present day. Fifteen-year-old Richard, who has learning difficulties, lives with his older brother Polly in a tumbledown caravan near an empty country house. Polly scrapes a living working at a local scrapyard, while Richard looks after his pet chicken Fiona and cooks up whatever's to hand. Polly, restless and volatile, loses his job on the same day that the electricity company disconnects the brothers' supply after new residents – Annabel and her mother – move into the property. Richard befriends the teenage Annabel, a would-be rebel who is taken with his odd outlook. She tends to Richard's wounds when he's been beaten up by an increasingly aggressive Polly, who feels burdened by looking after him. Polly gets a job in a travelling burger van, with an offer to stay on as it travels round the country; Richard is distressed when his brother tells him that he's leaving. Polly suggests that Richard is in fact his own son, the result of a sexually abusive encounter with his mother. After a heated confrontation, Polly leaves. Annabel takes charge, offering Richard emotional support and suggesting that he live at the house as a farmhand. Later, Richard torches the caravan and he and Annabel watch the flames together.



# Creature Designers The Frankenstein Complex

France 2015  
Directors: Alexandre Poncet, Gilles Penso  
Certificate 12A 107m 4s

## Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Four years ago, Alexandre Poncet and Gilles Penso made *Ray Harryhausen: Special Effects Titan*, a very engaging portrait of the visual-effects master. Harryhausen retired in 1981, after *Clash of the Titans*, recognising that the stop-motion animation techniques he'd pioneered were becoming redundant in the era of *Star Wars* (1977) and Industrial Light & Magic, and so *Creature Designers: The Frankenstein Complex* (in which both George Lucas's film and its spin-off effects company loom large) is a kind of sequel. Although tribute is paid to pioneers going back to Georges Méliès, Mary Shelley and even the Bible (Eden's serpent being the original 'monster'), the film's main subject is special-effects techniques from the late 1970s onwards, continuing the Harryhausen-esque theme of creating and breathing life into wholly imaginary beings.

There's a fair bit of philosophical discussion about what constitutes a 'creature' (Harryhausen hated the term 'monster'), with particular focus on the need to establish and maintain an emotional connection with the audience. Guillermo del Toro (one of the film's many distinguished talking heads) quotes Harryhausen's dictum that a successful creature has to be imagined in repose as well as in attack. However fantastical the result, if it's to interact successfully with live actors, it needs a convincing internal and external anatomy, though not necessarily anything too detailed – we can accept that dragons breathe fire without worrying about the precise mechanism.

Other mechanisms are more important, and the film devotes a great deal of time to exploring differing (and evolving) techniques and their suitability for particular jobs. Modern physical effects came of age in the 70s and early 80s, with pioneers such as Dick Smith, Rob Bottin and Rick Baker (the latter a significant contributor here) revolutionising 'movie makeup' in films such as *The Exorcist* (1973), *The Howling* and *An American Werewolf in London* (both 1981). At the

same time, stop-motion animators such as Phil Tippett continued the Harryhausen tradition, their work augmented by life-sized animatronics (better for close-ups), surprisingly old-fashioned puppets (Yoda in 1980's *The Empire Strikes Back*, the title characters in 1984's *Gremlins*) and the increasing involvement of CGI imagery, with *The Abyss* (1989), *Terminator 2* (1991) and *Jurassic Park* (1993) discussed in particular detail – and, later, the use of 'performance capture', as in *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-03) and *Avatar* (2009).

Fans of the Harryhausen documentary will be glad to hear that its considerable strengths are mostly replicated here. However, while that film featured numerous extracts from Harryhausen's movies, *Creature Designers* features disappointingly few examples of the various creatures in their natural environment – that is, the final film. John Landis and Rick Baker wax lyrical about the latter's contribution to *American Werewolf*, but his work is illustrated only by sketches and models. Elsewhere, we are granted brief glimpses from trailers, which traditionally make a point of not showing too much. This is clearly budget-related (most of these films are expensive big-studio productions), and it's a safe bet that anyone interested in the subject will already have seen most if not all of the relevant titles – but prospective viewers should be warned that acquainting themselves with the original works is all but essential.

There is, though, a gratifying amount of behind-the-scenes video footage, sometimes in the service of showing things going wrong, frustrating at the time but educational (and entertaining) now. And with that in mind, a closing call for future creature designers to be thoroughly grounded in older techniques becomes particularly heartfelt – not least because, despite the widespread tendency to use the term 'CGI' to describe most post-1990 special effects, even today these might be achieved by unexpectedly old-fashioned methods, with the puppeteers being discreetly painted out afterwards. 📺

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Alexandre Poncet  
**Written by**  
Alexandre Poncet  
Gilles Penso  
**Camera Operators**  
Alexandre Poncet  
Gilles Penso  
Sacha Feiner  
Frédéric Ambroisine  
Victor Huang  
Julien Dumont  
**Edited by**  
Gilles Penso  
**Music**  
Alexandre Poncet

**Sound Mixing**  
Lionel Guenoun  
**Production Companies**  
Frenetic Arts presents  
with the participation  
of Le Pacte a film by  
Alexandre Poncet  
and Gilles Penso  
**Film Extracts**  
*The Phantom of the Opera* (1925)  
*Gojira/Godzilla*,  
*King of the*

*Monsters!* (1954)  
*The Lost World* (1925)  
*Mighty Joe Young* (1949)  
*The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* (1958)  
*À la conquête du pôle/Conquest of the Pole* (1912)  
*King Kong* (1933)  
*Jurassic Park* (1993)  
*Mutant Land* (2010)  
*Jaws* (1975)  
*The Fly* (1986)  
*The Thing* (1982)  
*Terminator 2*

*Judgment Day* (1991)  
*King Kong* (2005)  
*Avatar* (2009)

**With**  
Guillermo del Toro  
Joe Dante  
John Landis  
Kevin Smith  
Rick Baker  
Phil Tippett  
Steve Johnson  
Alec Gillis  
Tom Woodruff Jr  
Matt Winston

**The Chiodo Brothers**  
[i.e., Charles Chiodo  
Edward Chiodo  
Stephen Chiodo]  
Dennis Muren  
Chris Walas  
Greg Nicotero  
Mick Garris  
Christophe Gans  
Mike Elizalde  
Richard Taylor  
Steve Williams  
Hal Hickel  
Joe Letteri  
John Rosengrant

**In Colour**  
[L78:1]  
**Part-subtitled**  
**Distributor**  
Studiocanal Limited

A documentary in which various filmmakers and special-effects experts discuss the cinema's ability to create imaginary creatures and make viewers believe they're alive. Pioneers (such as filmmaker Georges Méliès, actor Lon Chaney Sr, makeup artists Jack Pierce, John Chambers and Dick Smith and stop-motion animators Willis O'Brien and Ray Harryhausen) are praised, and the techniques behind individual films (especially 'Star Wars', 'An American Werewolf in London', 'The Thing', 'Gremlins', 'The Abyss', 'Terminator

2', 'Jurassic Park', 'Starship Troopers', 'The Lord of the Rings' and 'Avatar') discussed in detail, often by the people who worked on them. Technical subjects include men in rubber suits, stop-motion animation, special makeup effects, animatronics, puppetry and CGI, plus scheduling and budgetary pressures and the importance of not letting essential skills die out. Philosophical topics include the history of monsters (the Bible, 'Frankenstein') and the thrill of breathing convincing-looking life into a wholly original creation.

# Criminal

Canada/USA 2015  
Director: Ariel Vromen  
Certificate 15 113m 27s

## Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

You may entertain the possibility of Ariel Vromen's *Criminal* being an actually good movie for five minutes, which is about how long it takes for Gary Oldman to show up as the chief of the London office of the CIA with the improbable name Quaker Wells, barking orders from Grosvenor Square in an accent that sounds like Gary Oldman imitating Rob Brydon imitating Al Pacino. Thus assured that you need not strain yourself looking for signs of intelligent craftsmanship, you can sit back and be tumbled around for a couple of hours of lightly risible ludicrousness.

Friend Wells is vying for the fate of the free world with a Spanish anarchist (Jordi Mollà) who is helpfully introduced with a bit of onscreen text that reads "Spanish Anarchist", and whose MO seems to consist of tricksterish activity on a laptop, appearances on Piers Morgan's TV programme and plotting Armageddon. The fate of the free world, however, will fall into the hands of Jericho Stewart, an irredeemable convict who has a hairpiece and a name that screams *fin-de-siècle* Nic Cage, but who in fact is played by Kevin Costner.

Stewart, affected by experimental brain surgery that has sown his heretofore barren frontal lobe with the memories of a dead CIA agent, is disturbed when he suddenly begins to develop an emotional life through contact with the family of the deceased. The convict stirred to a new level of humanity through a dawning sense of paternal responsibility might recall Costner's best screen role, in Clint Eastwood's *A Perfect World* (1993), if that film had been stripped of all taste, tact and integrity and Costner's part had been seasoned with more of a *Sling Blade* Lennie from *Of Mice and Men* influence.

The final result is like a EuropaCorp version of *Flowers for Algernon*, inclined towards the mawkish but too tangled up even to tug heartstrings successfully, and far too timid to explore the ickier implications of the script by David Weisberg and Douglas Cook, who – lo and behold – co-wrote *The Rock* (1996). Vromen usually manages to cut back and forth with a reasonable degree of proficiency between people talking so that you can see the speaker's lips moving, and engineers not a single action set piece that would impress even a time-traveller from the Bronze Age. There are



Imitation game: Gary Oldman



➔ a few flashes of humour, some of which seem intentional, including the line, "Who punches someone in a patisserie, you animal?"

In spite of the fixation on megaproductions by the major studios, the multiplex desperately needs sturdy, non-tentpole middle-range genre work – the sort that *Criminal* might have been. It feels hampered by its relatively modest budget, however, straining against it rather than working within it. (As a contrast, I'd point to John Erick Dowdle's grimy, straight-ahead \$5m miracle *No Escape*.) *Criminal* is blockbuster bloviation done on the cheap, unable to cover up the cut corners even with day-rate rentals of Michael Pitt, Tommy Lee Jones and others who've probably already struck it from their CVs. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
J.C. Spink  
Jake Weiner  
Matt O'Toole  
Mark Gill  
Christa Campbell  
**Written by**  
Douglas Cook  
David Weisberg  
**Director of Photography**  
Dana Gonzales  
**Film Editor**  
Danny Rafic  
**Production Designer**  
Jon Henson  
**Music**  
Brian Tyler  
Keith Power  
**Sound Mixer**  
Martin Trevis  
**Costume Designer**  
Jill Taylor  
**Stunt Co-ordinator**  
Tom Struthers

©Criminal Productions, Inc.  
**Production Companies**  
Millennium  
Films present  
A Benderspink production and  
Millennium Films

production and a Campbell Grobman Films production  
A film by Ariel Vromen  
**Executive Producers**  
Avi Lerner  
Trevor Short  
Lati Grobman  
Douglas Urbanski  
Jason Bloom  
Kevin King-Templeton  
Boaz Davidson  
John Thompson  
Christine Otal  
Chris Bender

**Cast**  
Kevin Costner  
Jericho Stewart  
Gary Oldman  
Quaker Wells  
Tommy Lee Jones  
Dr Franks  
Alice Eve  
Marta Lynch  
Gal Gadot  
Jill Pope  
Michael Pitt  
Jan Ströok, 'The Dutchman'  
Jordi Mollà

Xavier Heimdahl  
Antje Traue  
Elsa Mueller  
Scott Adkins  
Pete Greensleaves  
Amaury Nolasco  
Esteban Ruiza  
Danny Webb  
Lewis Deane  
Colin Salmon  
warden  
Ryan Reynolds  
Bill Pope

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Lionsgate UK

London, present day. CIA operative Bill Pope is on his way to pay off a hacker, known as the Dutchman, who has developed a program that gives him control of the world's weapons. Pope is waylaid and killed by the operatives of a Spanish anarchist, Heimdahl, who wants the Dutchman's technology for his own uses. Pope was in possession of crucial information, so the head of London's CIA offices decides to use an experimental procedure to transfer Pope's memories into the mind of another man – convict Jericho Stewart. The procedure is a success, but Stewart is uncooperative and escapes, following the trail of Pope's memories to the home of his widow Jill and their young daughter. The CIA recaptures Stewart but he escapes again during an assassination attempt by Heimbahl's men, and returns to the Pope home, where he plans to recover the missing ransom destined for the Dutchman. However, he discovers that he has also acquired Pope's love for his family. Finally, the CIA, Russian agents also vying for the program, Heimdahl's team, Stewart and the Dutchman all converge in the grounds of the University of London. Stewart recovers the program after the Dutchman is killed, but seems to surrender it to Heimdahl, who has taken the Pope family hostage. This is a ruse, however: Heimdahl is dispatched by an American missile. Stewart recovers from his wounds to inherit Pope's family and job.

## The Daughter

Australia 2015  
Director: Simon Stone  
Certificate 15 94m 52s

### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

#### Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*, which this film is 'inspired by', marked an abrupt swerve in the playwright's moral stance. Completed in 1884, it bewildered contemporary audiences, coming as it did immediately after *An Enemy of the People* (source at one remove of Spielberg's *Jaws*), in which the truth-telling Dr Stockmann finds himself vilified by a repressed, hypocritical society. Stockmann's counterpart in *The Wild Duck* is Gregers Werle who, with his "claim of the ideal", insists that everyone must be forced to face up to the truth in order to achieve "transfiguration" and "a new life". The result of his doctrinaire meddling is the destruction of a whole family and the death of a teenage girl.

This adaptation from Australian stage director Simon Stone uses the broad framework and dramatic structure of Ibsen's play but transposes it fluently into a present-day Australian setting – and never for a moment feels like 'filmed theatre'.

Almost all the key characters of Ibsen's play have their equivalents in Stone's screenplay. The sole interpolated character is Adam, the teenage Hedvig's ineffectual boyfriend (and Hedvig herself is the only one to retain the same name as in the original). Werle's modern-day incarnation is Christian Neilson (Paul Schneider), an expat son over from the States, leaving behind him a crumbling marriage. In his character lies the key difference between play and film: where Gregers is driven by an abstract idea, however misguided, Christian seems simply to want everyone else to be as miserable as he is. This makes for something of a motivational hole in the action, though Schneider's tormented, self-loathing performance largely makes up for it.

Stone and his DP Andrew Commis have no truck with the conventional image of Australia as a sun-drenched terrain of wide-open spaces. The predominant tone is dark and brooding,



Duck dynasty: Anna Torv, Geoffrey Rush

with scenes often shot in gloomy interiors or at night. Christian in particular seems to carry a shadow about with him, which he gradually passes on like an infection to Oliver (Ewen Leslie), the childhood friend whose happiness he's about to destroy. But it's on Hedvig, Oliver's beloved teenage daughter, that the darkness finally falls with most disastrous effect – all the more tellingly, given Odessa Young's luminous, unaffectedly open-hearted performance. It says a lot for Young's achievement that she holds her own against a roster of Antipodean acting royalty, including Geoffrey Rush as Christian's father Henry and Sam Neill as Oliver's father Walter.

Ironically, the one element that links the film most inextricably back to its source is the only one that feels superfluous: the wild duck itself. The bird is shot and wounded by Henry, who then entrusts it to Walter to keep in his unofficial menagerie, until its fate becomes inextricably bound up with Hedvig's. Every time it's mentioned, let alone seen on screen, the obtrusive symbol-clashing becomes almost deafening. That apart, though, Stone has effected a masterly transmutation of what might seem awkwardly intractable material into cinematic form, remaining faithful to the spirit of the original without letting himself be constrained by it. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Jan Chapman  
Nicole O'Donohue  
**Written by**  
Simon Stone  
Inspired by Henrik Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*  
Inspired by the stage production of *The Wild Duck* by Simon Stone with Chris Ryan. After Henrik Ibsen.  
**Director of Photography**  
Andrew Commis  
**Editor**  
Veronika Jenet  
**Production Designer**  
Steven Jones-Evans  
**Composer**  
Mark Bradshaw  
**Sound Designer**  
Liam Egan  
**Costume Designer**  
Margot Wilson

©Jan Chapman Films Pty Ltd, Wildflower Films Pty Ltd, Screen Australia, Screen NSW, Kazstar Australia Pty Ltd, Fate Films Pty Ltd

**Production Companies**  
Screen Australia presents in association with Screen NSW, The Gingerbread Man, Kazstar and Roadshow Films a Jan Chapman Films & Wildflower Films production  
Developed with the assistance of Waking Dream Productions & The Screen Australia Enterprise Program  
Financed with the assistance of Kazstar Australia, The Gingerbread Man  
Financed in association with Fulcrum Media Finance and Media Super  
Developed and financed in association with Screen NSW and its Regional Filming Fund  
Principal investor: Screen Australia

**Cast**  
Geoffrey Rush  
Henry  
Ewen Leslie  
Oliver  
Paul Schneider  
Christian  
Miranda Otto  
Charlotte  
Anna Torv  
Anna  
Odessa Young  
Hedvig  
Sam Neill  
Walter

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Metrodome Distribution Ltd

New South Wales, present day. Henry owns the local sawmill, which is closing down. He's about to marry his housekeeper, the much younger Anna. Henry's son Christian returns from the US for the wedding and meets his childhood friend Oliver, now married to Henry's former housekeeper Charlotte. They have a teenage daughter, Hedvig. Also living with them is Oliver's father Walter, Henry's former business partner, recently released from jail. In the forest, Hedvig and boyfriend Adam start to have sex, but it's not a success and Adam runs off. Oliver has a job interview in Sydney and Christian goes with him; the pair get drunk and are picked up by a couple of girls.

Christian's wife Skypes him from New York to say she's leaving him. He gets drunk and accuses Henry of having had an affair with Charlotte, causing Christian's mother to kill herself. Walter tells Christian that he and Henry were both embezzling money from the sawmill but that he took sole blame. At Henry's wedding, Christian tells Oliver about Charlotte's affair with Henry. When Oliver confronts Charlotte, she confesses that Hedvig is Henry's daughter. Oliver knocks Henry down and moves into a motel. Hedvig, uncomprehending and desperately unhappy, comes on to Christian, who rejects her with horror. She goes to see Oliver, who also rejects her. Hedvig shoots herself with Walter's shotgun. At the hospital, Oliver, Charlotte and Walter wait to see if she'll survive.



## Departure

United Kingdom/France 2015  
Director: Andrew Steggall

### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Water imagery pervades writer-director Andrew Steggall's debut feature film. The reservoir outside a small southern French village features largely in the action: it's where the teenage Elliot (Alex Lawther, the young Alan Turing in *The Imitation Game*) first glimpses Clément (Phénix Brossard), a slightly older French youth, and where they later have their first sexual encounter. Clément happily swims there, while Elliot timidly insists it's forbidden; only at the very end of the film does he dare to take the plunge, enacting his recurrent subaqueous dream for real. His mother Beatrice (Juliet Stevenson), tussling with her own inhibitions, laments "I think I'm drowning", while Elliot's father Philip recommends he listen to Dvorák's opera *Rusalka*, whose heroine is a water nymph. Water can embrace but it can also wound: Elliot retains a vivid memory of his mother being scalded by a malfunctioning hot tap. Emotions, relationships, sexuality are fluid, constantly shifting; nothing remains stable.

Nor is this one of those films where everything is neatly resolved at the end, with redemption or closure awarded. True, Beatrice and Philip decide to part, but it's evident their marriage has already been dead for some time. "Some people have sex – we bought houses," comments Beatrice resignedly. And when the emotionally closed-off Philip (Finbar Lynch) tells Elliot, in Beatrice's presence, "Your mother has given up things and maybe she didn't need to," it's not clear whether by 'things' he means himself, or the possibility of a more satisfying life with somebody else. Her sudden embrace of Clément, kissing him on the mouth when she thinks Elliot isn't around, seems less like a serious attempt to seduce the young man than a desperate need for the warmth of erotic contact, however brief.

Now and then the film skirts cliché, though Steggall is sardonically aware of it; contemplating the self-consciously fey Elliot, invariably clad in a cast-off military jacket like some hangover from the 1960s, Clément even tells him, "You're a bit of a cliché – the poet." Nor are Elliot's burgeoning



Loss leaders: Alex Lawther, Juliet Stevenson

gay impulses treated with much reverence: alone in bed, he achieves satisfaction with the aid of a strategically inserted carrot. Beatrice is afforded more dignity, though it's hinted – especially in a scene with her Irish neighbour Sally (a subtly malicious cameo from Niamh Cusack) – that she tends to call down misfortune on herself as an alibi for inaction. With her expressive features, Stevenson eloquently suggests a woman who sees her life closing down on her but can't locate the energy needed to fight back.

Underpinning all this is the beauty of the Languedoc landscape (evocatively captured in Brian Fawcett's photography) and the lyrical melancholy of East Anglian singer-songwriter Oliver Daldry's 'Catch the Wind'. Occasionally, the imagery feels overdetermined: a scene where Elliot sits in his bedroom as autumn leaves float down around him is a nudge too far. Steggall has described *Departure* as "a mythologised eulogy to love and loss"; if it's the latter that predominates, that only adds to the film's emotional heft. **B**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Pietro Greppi  
Guillaume Tobo  
Cora Palfrey  
**Written by**  
Andrew Steggall  
**Director of Photography**  
Brian Fawcett  
**Editor**  
Dounia Sichov

**Original Music**  
Jools Scott  
**Sound Designer**  
Tom Drew  
**Costume Designer**  
Holly Waddington

©Departure Film  
Limited, The British  
Film Institute  
**Production**

**Companies**  
BFI presents in  
association with  
Amaro Films a Motion  
Group Pictures and  
Connectic Studio  
production  
Made with the  
support of the  
BFI's Film Fund  
**Executive Producers**

Daniel Campos  
Pavoncelli  
Georgia Oetker  
Stephanie Keelan  
Karine Riahi

**Cast**  
Juliet Stevenson  
Beatrice  
Alex Lawther

Elliot  
Phénix Brossard  
Clément  
Niamh Cusack  
Sally  
Patrice Juiff  
François  
Finbar Lynch  
Philip  
Wilson Moore  
Adam

**In Colour**  
[L85:1]  
**Part-subtitled**

**Distributor**  
Peccadillo  
Pictures Ltd

A village in Languedoc, present day. Beatrice, an Englishwoman whose marriage to Philip is failing, arrives with her 15-year-old son Elliot to clear and close up their holiday home prior to selling it. Arriving by car at night they hit something that Elliot thinks was a deer. Later, Elliot sees a slightly older youth, Clément, swimming in the reservoir; they talk, and he invites him home to help shift the furniture. Clément, who's from Paris, is staying with his aunt in the village, as his mother is dying of cancer. He stays for dinner, and they open one of Philip's expensive bottles of wine. The next day all three go to the nearby town of Lagrasse. When Elliot wanders off, Beatrice kisses Clément, but Elliot sees them.

Philip arrives and he and Beatrice meet with a lawyer to arrange the sale of the house. Elliot and Clément take a boat out on the reservoir; Clément strips off and swims, and afterwards Elliot masturbates him. That evening, when they all have dinner together, Philip's censorious attitude precipitates a row. Beatrice drives him back to the airport; on the way there she tells him she's long known that he's gay. He agrees to move out. Back at the house, Beatrice burns the furniture. Clément, who's been trying to fix a motorbike, gives up on it and announces that he's returning to Paris. Elliot drags him off to find the wounded deer; they fight, and then kiss. Left alone, Elliot dives into the reservoir, while Beatrice sits weeping in the empty house.

## Evolution

France/Spain/Belgium 2015  
Director: Lucile Hadzihalilovic  
Certificate 15 81m 41s

See Feature  
on page 30

### Reviewed by Richard Combs

**Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist**

Should we begin with the starfish? It seems inevitable, since it appears at the start of Lucile Hadzihalilovic's two feature films to date. In *Innocence* (2004), it was a decorative emblem on the coffin that transported the new girl to a secluded boarding school. In *Evolution*, the starfish is where it should be, in a marine pool, and is first seen by ten-year-old Nicolas (Max Brebant) as he swims near his island home and glimpses the bright red echinoderm perched on what looks like the drowned body of another boy.

The symbolism of the starfish is potentially wide-ranging, including its representation of the Virgin Mary – the Stella Maris, 'Star of the Sea' – as a guarantor of safe conduct over troubled waters. For the purposes of *Evolution*, a peculiar aspect of starfish biology might be more to the point: its ability to reproduce both sexually and asexually. Nicolas and the other boys living in their isolated home (there are no girls, just as there were no boys in *Innocence* until its final scenes) seem to have been corralled for a scientific experiment in which they are implanted with embryos that are then delivered either through caesarean or in some kind of birthing tank. The medical staff are all female, and the boys live with female carers whom they accept as their mothers.

This is a place of strange, threatening rituals – such as the night-time sessions on the beach where the 'mothers' writhe orgasmically on the sand in a (star-shaped) circle. Most threatening are the peeling, dilapidated precincts of the hospital where Nicolas is eventually injected with the substance that will result in him giving birth. To prepare for this parturition, he is fed every day with a greenish, worm-like gruel and given a dose of medicine. This, he is told, is "because at your age your body is changing and weakening... like lizards or crabs". Starfish, though, have a more special destiny: "They only change once, at birth. Afterwards a new cycle begins, a new life."

Where do the boys fit in this scheme of creation? Or is the scheme itself just a heightened version, a surrealistic exaggeration, of what they can expect as they approach puberty? The world here – the dark volcanic sand, a tight little village of white houses – is as strangely but as satisfyingly organised as the dank tunnels and lush forest of *Innocence*. For Hadzihalilovic, the sense of control is essential to the creation of a complete, self-enclosed world, and to a visual aesthetic with its own stilled, enigmatic quality, like the de Chirico paintings she admires.

A shot in the opening title sequence – looking up from beneath the surface of the water as Nicolas swims above, like a lonely spermatozoon – suggests that the air of menace hanging over these worlds is not an external threat so much as the anxieties of growth and change, the struggle of life. The women – who the boys begin to suspect are not really their mothers – also look as if they might be in transition, their skin pallid and uniformly smooth, their large dark eyes vaguely cetacean. If *Evolution* is defined by its fantastical exaggerations, they seem tilted towards science fiction, as *Innocence* was





The young boy and the sea: Julie-Marie Parmentier, Max Brebant, Nathalie Le Gosles

to suggestions of horror. The scientific apparatus of cross-gender pregnancy and birth has a Cronenberg look, while the two humanoid creatures to which Nicolas gives birth might owe their p/maternity to David Lynch.

Elsewhere, there's a glowing, detailed naturalism in Manuel Dacosse and Rafael Herrero's underwater photography in the reefs around Lanzarote. This could be the world of Jacques Cousteau, but the naturalism has its own surrealistic shock, and the languorous movement of the multicoloured flora fits in Hadzihalilovic's stated aesthetic: "We wanted to capture a kind of abstraction through organic matter and movement." The Scope images are alternately

immersed in the big blue or fragmented by dark, sulphurous spaces in the hospital.

Eventually, Nicolas is led into the depths when he is befriended by a nurse (Roxane Duran) at the hospital, and they set off on an underwater odyssey that is also a kind of mating. Or is it "the dream of a friend... somewhere on our very own planet", as Mike Nichols described the relationship between the human protagonist and a cetacean companion in his non-surrealist fantasy *The Day of the Dolphin* (1973)? The nurse eventually abandons Nicolas and he finds himself on the shore of a brightly lit city that looks like our world. Only after she disappears do we learn that her name is Stella. ☹

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producers

Sylvie Pialat  
Benoit Quainon  
Jerome Vidal  
Screenplay  
Lucile Hadzihalilovic  
Alante Kavaite  
With the collaboration  
of Geoff Cox

#### Directors of Photography

Manuel Dacosse  
Underwater:  
Rafael Herrero  
Editor

Nassim Gordji-Tehrani

#### Art Direction

Laia Colet

#### Sound

Fabiola Ordoyo  
Marc Orts  
Dani Fontrodona  
Costumes  
Jackye Fauconnier

©Les Films du Worso,

Noodles Production,  
Volcano Films, Evo  
Films A.I.E., Scope  
Pictures, Left

Field Ventures

#### Production Companies

Les Films du Worso,  
Noodles Production  
present a Les  
Films du Worso,  
Noodles Production  
production in  
co-production with  
Volcano Films, Evo  
Films A.I.E., Scope  
Pictures, Left  
Field Ventures  
With the participation

of Canal+, Ciné+  
In association with  
Indefilms 3, Palatine  
Etoile 12, Cinefeel  
Prod, Ex Nihilo  
With the support  
of ICAA - Ministère  
de la Culture  
A film by Lucile  
Hadzihalilovic  
Developed with the  
support of Centre  
National du Cinéma  
de l'Image animée

#### Cast

Max Brebant  
Nicolas  
Roxane Duran  
Stella  
Julie-Marie  
Parmentier  
mother  
Mathieu Goldfeld  
Victor  
Nissim Renard  
Franck  
Pablo-Noé Etienne  
boy

Nathalie Le Gosles  
doctor

In Colour  
[2.35:1]  
Subtitles

Distributor  
Metrodome  
Distribution Ltd

On a barren island, ten-year-old Nicolas lives in a community of boys; they are cared for by women they accept as their mothers. One day while swimming, Nicolas sees what appears to be a dead boy on the seabed, with a starfish resting on him. His mother gives him medicine, which she says is for the changes his body is undergoing; she later reassures Nicolas that there was no drowned boy. When Nicolas cuts his hand on the coral, he is treated by a nurse, Stella, from the island's hospital. After he is given an injection in his stomach, Stella comforts him and coaxes him to show her his book of drawings. He joins a ward of boys who are all undergoing the same procedure. At

home that night, he watches the mothers assemble on the seashore and writhe orgasmically in the sand. A scan reveals that something is growing in Nicolas's stomach. The other boys now share his suspicions that they are being lied to, and that the women are not their mothers. Stella reveals the partly non-human details of her own anatomy. In the final stages of his operation, Nicolas finds himself strapped in a tank, giving birth to two humanoid infants. He is rescued by Stella and they travel, clasped together, underwater; eventually, from a boat, they view their distant island home. Stella returns to the sea. At night, Nicolas approaches a neon-lit modern city.

## Florence Foster Jenkins

United Kingdom/France 2016

Director: Stephen Frears

Certificate PG 110m 14s

### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Florence Foster Jenkins, deluded and much derided amateur operatic singer of the 1940s, has currently slipped back into the general awareness with two films, released almost simultaneously. (Remarks about buses can be taken as read.) Xavier Giannoli's *Marguerite*, starring Catherine Frot in the title role, transferred her to 1920s Paris and fictionalised her as 'Marguerite Dumont' – a nod to Margaret Dumont, majestically impervious butt of the Marx Brothers' gags, seemed clearly intended. (Frot's performance has won her a César.) Stephen Frears's film sticks more closely to the facts, and boasts an astonishingly virtuoso performance from an undubbed Meryl Streep, who has evidently now added the art of singing excruciatingly off-key to her ever-expanding list of talents.

What both films share is a sympathy for Marguerite/Florence. She may be ridiculous but there's no self-interest in her pretensions; she really does love music, and believes she can bring pleasure to her listeners. Our first view of Streep's Florence, as a plump, matronly angel being precariously lowered by a rope from the flies by four straining stagehands, is richly comic but immediately likeable. This is a woman who, however unwittingly, can add to the gaiety of nations – a talent much needed in 1944. There's a warmth to Streep's portrayal that suggests she likes her character and relishes her harmless absurdities.

Indeed, if there's a fault to be found in Frears's film it might be an overall blandness; there are no really dislikeable characters. Even Earl Wilson (Christian McKay), the *New York Post* critic whose hostile review finally destroys Florence, isn't a villain; what motivates him isn't malice but the offence to his professional integrity when St Clair Bayfield (Hugh Grant), Florence's manager and second husband, blatantly tries to bribe him. Those who flatter Florence and praise her singing, Bayfield not least, of course have no desire to offend a rich and generous patron, but at the same time they seem touched by her kindness and genuinely don't want to hurt her.

Still, if acid is missing from the overall mix, the wealth of humour more than makes up for it. As ex-actor Bayfield, Grant is as good as he's ever been, whether playing up the ultra-Britishness of his role by reciting chunks of Shakespeare and Keats in a fruity, orotund accent or indulging in a startlingly energetic bout of 20s-style jive-dancing at an after-concert party. Simon Helberg (from *The Big Bang Theory*) almost steals the film as Cosmé McMoon, the young pianist drafted in to act as Florence's accompanist; his reaction shots when he first hears her sing are a joy to watch, as are his desperate attempts to suppress paroxysms of laughter in a crowded lift immediately after the session. There's another scene-stealing turn from Nina Arianda as Agnes, Bronx-accented blonde-floozy second wife of a meatpacking magnate, who helplessly loses it at Florence's private concert – but then furiously harangues the audience into applauding at the Carnegie Hall performance that inaugurates, and concludes, the singer's public career. (The city of Liverpool deserves a credit, too, for standing in so convincingly for 40s New York.) Only Rebecca



## Friend Request

Director: Simon Verhoeven  
Certificate 15 92m 9s

### Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

There's plenty of gothic potential in the metaphysical spaces of the online world, where identity becomes ambiguous and where images and objects are invested with personality and power. That rich seam is mined in solid, workmanlike fashion by this campus-set shocker, which starts from the premise that the millennial generation are far too relaxed about sharing intimate details of their lives online, and then swiftly moves in the direction of demons, magic mirrors, curses, witchcraft and a series of splatter deaths.

The juxtaposition of ancient necromancy with the shiny blue-and-white interface of a Facebook-style social-media site comes about through the ill-fated decision of perfect, popular Laura (Alycia Debnam-Carey) to accept the friend request of strange, dowdy newcomer Marina (Liesl Ahlers). As Laura scrolls down Marina's page, she sees that her only posts are dark drawings of forests and crows and spooky animations depicting occult rituals. This impressive design work – by Jonathan Schönberger, Thalia Stefaniuk and Marlena Zadykiewicz – adds immensely to the atmosphere of foreboding, and director Simon Verhoeven wisely exploits it to the maximum, taking the audience on a trip through Marina's disturbed inner life in one of the most memorable sections of the film. It's a pity that, in contrast, Laura herself is so very dull: as she falls victim first to Marina's obsessive online stalking, and later to a post-suicide Marina's vengeful ghost, it's difficult to care very much about her or her shallow friends. This retreat into conventional horror-victim characterisation seems a waste of an interesting premise about the misalignment of online glamour and real-world personality.

Marina's revenge is twofold: she wants to take away both Laura's close friends and the 800 or so online followers she has accumulated, so that she "will know what it's like to be lonely". As Laura's chums succumb one by one to the demonic manifestation of Marina's spirit, horrific videos of their grisly deaths appear on Laura's timeline as if she had posted them herself. Any attempt to delete the posts or close her account just brings up an 'unknown error' message;



Kill your friends: Liesl Ahlers



Princess of wails: Hugh Grant, Meryl Streep

Ferguson has to struggle with an underwritten role as Kathleen, Bayfield's clandestine girlfriend.

Ferguson's role apart, Nicholas Martin's script (handled by Frears with his customary unshowy flair and skill with actors) offers plenty to enjoy. Florence's idea of gastronomic excellence, we're told, was sandwiches and potato salad; at one gathering, she tells a maid that she's worried supplies of the latter are about to run out. In the next shot we see the maid, armed with a bowl, in the bathroom, where the tub is brimful of the stuff.

Then, without warning, the film strikes a

darker note. When Florence takes to her bed, exhausted after her private concert, Bayfield calls in a doctor who, seeing telltale scars on her body, asks when she contracted syphilis. "On my wedding night," she tells him. "I was 18." The revelation isn't dwelt on, but it lends an unexpected tragic depth to a woman who otherwise might appear little more than an overdressed figure of fun, and suggests a hint of wounded desperation behind her need to be loved and applauded. It lends added pathos, too, to her final valiant words: "People may say I can't sing – but no one can ever say I didn't sing." ☹

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Michael Kuhn  
Tracey Seaward

#### Written by

Nicholas Martin

#### Director of

Photography

Danny Cohen

#### Edited by

Valerio Bonelli

#### Production Designer

Alan MacDonald

#### Music Composed

Alan MacDonald

#### and Conducted by

Alexandre Desplat

#### Production

Sound Mixer

Peter Lindsay

#### Costume Designer

Consolata Boyle

©Pathé Productions

Limited

#### Production

Companies

Pathé and BBC

#### Films present with

the participation

of Canal+ and

Ciné+ a Qwerty

Films production

A Stephen Frears film

A Qwerty Films

production for Pathé

Developed by Pathé

Executive Producers

Cameron McCracken

Christine Langan

Malcolm Ritchie

#### Cast

Meryl Streep

Florence Foster

Jenkins

Hugh Grant

St Clair Bayfield

Simon Helberg

Cosmé McMoon

Rebecca Ferguson

Kathleen

Nina Arianda

Agnes Stark

David Haig

Carlo Edwards

Brid Brennan

Kitty

John Kavanagh

Arturo Toscanini

Stanley Townsend

Phineas Stark

Allan Corduner

John Totten

Christian McKay

Earl Wilson

John Sessions

Dr Hermann

#### Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

Curzon Film World

New York, 1944. Florence Foster Jenkins, a wealthy socialite in her mid-seventies, has a passion for classical music and generously supports the city's music scene with the help of her British husband and manager St Clair Bayfield. The couple have an affectionate but platonic relationship; St Clair has his own apartment, where he lives with his girlfriend Kathleen. Florence takes professional singing lessons and believes against all the evidence that she is a naturally talented singer. After attending a concert given by the famous soprano Lily Pons, Florence decides that she too will give a concert, and hires an aspiring young pianist, Cosmé McMoon, as her accompanist. St Clair vets the guest list to restrict the audience largely to personal friends, and bribes any journalists who want to attend. Only one journalist,

Earl Wilson of the 'New York Post', contemptuously rejects the bribe. The concert is a success, though Agnes Stark, wife of a meatpacking magnate, is seized with helpless laughter at Florence's terrible singing. Encouraged, Florence decides to give a public concert at Carnegie Hall, with 1,000 free tickets for US servicemen. St Clair vainly tries to dissuade her. The concert goes ahead; to begin with, most of the people in the audience shriek with laughter at Florence's performance, but Agnes stands up and furiously harangues them into applauding. Reviews the next morning are laudatory, with the exception of Wilson's; he denounces Florence as "the worst singer in the world". St Clair tries to keep it from Florence, but she finds a copy and collapses in the foyer of her hotel. She dies a few weeks later, with St Clair at her bedside.



worse still, it becomes clear that being friended by Marina means she's coming for you next. Laura's appalled followers, who assume she is a disgusting troll, soon desert her, though it's hard to believe that this is really as traumatic as watching your friends die horribly, not to mention being investigated by the police (nicely played as sardonic comic relief by Shashawnee Hall and Nicholas Pauling) as a possible murderer.

As Marina's tragic backstory is gradually revealed, the film tries to resolve its numerous strands into a moral message about showing tolerance to troubled misfits, but this isn't enough to pull the narrative into a coherent whole, and there's a sense that Verhoeven couldn't quite decide whether he was making a psychological thriller or simply putting together a series of effective jump scares. The idea that Marina is both an old-fashioned monster and a piece of annoying malware is an interesting one, but it soon becomes unwieldy. If the film eventually feels like two different stories spliced roughly together, its well-executed set pieces probably deliver enough tension and gore to keep horror lovers satisfied. **B**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Producers</b> Quirin Berg Max Wiedemann	<b>Production Companies</b> Warner Bros. Pictures presents a Wiedemann & Berg Filmproduktion production in co-production with Seven Pictures and Two Oceans Production A film by Simon Verhoeven	<b>Sean Marquette</b> Gustavo <b>Liesl Ahlers</b> Marina
<b>Written by</b> Matthew Ballen Philip Koch Simon Verhoeven <b>Director of Photography</b> Jo Heim <b>Film Editors</b> Tom Seil Denis Bachter <b>Production Designers</b> Tommy Stark Sylvain Gingras <b>Music</b> Gary Go Martin Todsharow <b>Sound Design</b> Nico Krebs <b>Costume Designers</b> Tatjana Brecht- Bergen Wolfgang Ender	<b>Cast</b> <b>Alycia Debnam-Carey</b> Laura <b>Connor Paolo</b> Kobe <b>William Moseley</b> Tyler <b>Brit Morgan</b> Olivia <b>Brooke Markham</b> Isabel	<b>In Colour</b> [2.35:1]  <b>Distributor</b> Warner Bros. Pictures International (UK)

A university in the US, present day. Psychology student Laura is the most popular girl on campus: she is pretty and successful, has a good-looking boyfriend, Tyler, and two best friends, Olivia and Isabel, who share an apartment with her. On a social-networking website, she has more than 800 friends who enjoy her many updates about her perfect life; when class misfit Marina sends her a friend request, she accepts it. However, Marina quickly becomes an obsessive stalker, and when Laura unfriends her, she commits suicide. Returning as a demon intent on showing Laura what it's like to be lonely, Marina sabotages Laura's life by killing off her friends one by one, as well as her mother, and posting gruesome videos of their deaths on Laura's page. Her classmates, the university authorities and the police all believe that Laura has posted them herself; she is suspended and her followers start unfriending her. Neither the videos nor the account can be deleted and Laura realises that the only way to exorcise the demon is to find Marina's body and her laptop. She tracks it down to a derelict factory, but Marina's ghost kills Laura, who then comes back to life in another university campus where is she now the class misfit.

## Golden Years

United Kingdom 2015  
Director: John Miller  
Certificate 12A 96m 11s

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Their pension pot has suddenly shrunk to nothing, prescription charges have gone through the roof thanks to the NHS postcode lottery, the bowls club at the centre of their social lives is under threat, and what they can look forward to is seeing out their days in a care home run for private gain. It's no wonder elderly couple Bernard Hill and Virginia McKenna look somewhat worn down by the realities of getting old. Settled in a cosy corner of Bristol suburbia, they're not exactly on the frontline of hardship, but the fact that they're facing an uncertain financial future after working all their lives feels decidedly unfair set against a context of rocketing bankers' bonuses.

The film's a comedy, by the way, where the zinger is that these two become unlikely bank robbers, targeting rural branches while they tour National Trust properties in their caravan. But it's the time the film takes to understand their lives that makes this a much richer viewing experience than something played solely for laughs. That said, the bit of business involving a security guard's trip over Hill's four-wheeled shopper, which results in the latter accidentally toddling off with a major cash consignment, is very neatly done, and the sight of 84-year-old McKenna, formerly a somewhat prim icon of 50s and 60s British cinema, gleefully paintballing a security camera in the midst of a heist, can't help but raise a smile.

Director John Miller takes a steady-as-she-goes approach, which is appropriate given the material, and doesn't strain to milk the sentiment or allow the heist high jinks to get too knockabout, though the screenplay leaves him with an awful lot to pack in. The local bowls club, under threat when the landowners decide to sell up, becomes central to the plot, since the film makes a persuasive case for the particular importance of community to the elderly when



Daylight rubbery: Phil Davis, Bernard Hill

the alternative is mouldering away lonely at home. Here, with lovely performances from reserved metalworker Phil Davis, the more outgoing Simon Callow and his cheery other half Una Stubbs, there's a believable sense of the value of friendship, which adeptly finds an echo in Sue Johnston's fine supporting turn as the long-neglected spouse of Alun Armstrong, the veteran detective initially flummoxed by the robberies. Her impassioned plea for him to save their marriage by putting in a bit more effort carries a surprising emotional charge. But as this strand of the narrative gathers more significance as the film goes on, the one-last-job finale, with all parties converging on a bank holding substantial cash deposits for bankers' bonuses, simply gets bogged down by trying to keep too many balls in the air at once.

It's a shame the film loses momentum so late in the day, because the first hour is most engaging. But this well-cast, effectively witty offering certainly makes a strong play for older audiences by taking them, their concerns and aspirations, with due seriousness. **B**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Mark Foligno <b>Written by</b> Nick Knowles John Miller Jeremy Sheldon Additional writing by David Quantick <b>Director of Photography</b> Adam Lincoln <b>Edited by</b> Kim Gaster Will Gilbey Dan Lincoln <b>Production Designer</b> Myra Lewis	<b>Music</b> Neil Athale <b>Supervising Sound Editor</b> Richard Kondal <b>Costume Designer</b> Georgina Napier  ©MoliFilms Entertainment <b>Production Companies</b> MoliFilms Entertainment presents in association with Sugar House	<b>Pictures &amp; Gran Theft</b> Ortho Productions a MoliFilms Entertainment, Golden Years production A Miller Knowles film Produced by MoliFilms Entertainment Golden Years Limited on behalf of MoliFilms Entertainment Limited <b>Executive Producers</b> Brad Moore Nick Knowles	<b>Robert Muston</b> Rowan Constable Chris Greenhill Mark Scribbins Alex Ohanian Babak Eftekhari Ben White Jeanne Ng Raj Iqbal Rick Singh Iain Speirs Jill Speirs Richard Tibber Christian Flood Philip Perry Andrew White Andrea Coates	<b>Stephen Coates</b> Gary Preston <b>Film Extracts</b> <i>Chariots of Fire</i> (1981) <i>Scarface</i> (1983)  <b>Cast</b> <b>Bernard Hill</b> Arthur <b>Virginia McKenna</b> Martha <b>Sue Johnston</b> Nancy <b>Phil Davis</b> Brian <b>Brad Moore</b>	<b>Stringer</b> <b>Mark Williams</b> Phil <b>Una Stubbs</b> Shirley <b>Ellen Thomas</b> Thelma <b>Simon Callow</b> Royston <b>Alun Armstrong</b> Sid  <b>In Colour</b> [2.35:1]  <b>Distributor</b> Moli Films
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Suburban Bristol, present day. Arthur and his wife Martha face the problems of growing old. They are upset by his elderly father's poor treatment in a care home and angered by daunting prescription charges for her Crohn's medication; they also feel swindled because his pension has been rendered virtually worthless. Arthur plans to rob his building society but accidentally finds himself in possession of £75,000 when a security guard trips over his shopping trolley. Martha later discovers the cash in the garden shed, and worries about being an accomplice. After Arthur's father attempts suicide, however, she angrily agrees to help Arthur commit another robbery. Wearing masks and brandishing

cucumbers wrapped in bin bags, the pair target several more building societies in the course of a caravan tour of National Trust stately homes. Veteran police detective Sid eventually works out that they are the perpetrators, but by now Arthur has roped in his friends from the bowls club for one last job on a rural branch holding the bankers' bonuses. Sid's long-suffering wife Nancy persuades him not to arrest the couple, to compensate for years of marital neglect; she even takes part in the heist. The arrival of Sid's colleague Stringer fails to prevent a successful robbery. The money saves the bowls club from being sold, so Arthur and the others dance the night away in celebration.



## Green Room

Director: Jeremy Saulnier  
Certificate 18 94m 51s

See Feature  
on page 34

### Reviewed by Adam Nayman

*Green Room* arrives with expectations. After debuting in 2007 with the overtly referential horror-comedy *Murder Party* – which featured characters dressed up like the protagonists of *Blade Runner* and *The Warriors* – Jeremy Saulnier stripped things down nicely for the chase thriller *Blue Ruin* (2013), a punchy, pungent slab of pulp fiction that had critics invoking no lesser film than *Blood Simple*. In telling the story of an amateur assassin struggling mightily with the mechanics of his task, Saulnier conveyed a winning underdog vibe while also proving himself a pro at the nuts and bolts of action filmmaking. Beneath its slender revenge narrative, the film offered a veritable masterclass in witty widescreen compositions and relentless left-to-right momentum. Deft technique aside, the best thing about *Blue Ruin* was its self-contained quality. Even as the action swerved wildly across US state lines, the script kept its themes and meanings tightly circumscribed.

Now, for his ostensible mainstream breakthrough, Saulnier doubles down on the notion of claustrophobia. In lieu of the open roads of the Midwest, *Green Room* confines itself almost entirely to a punk club deep in the forests of Oregon, where the members of a band accidentally witness a murder after a show and have to fight their way to freedom against a horde of heavily armed neo-Nazis.

This is a 'bottle episode' approach to movie storytelling, but *Green Room* also aims for wider meaning. Where *Blue Ruin* essayed an age-old, eye-for-an-eye family feud, the follow-up has been kitted out with ideological implications. In outline, this is a movie about a pitched battle between progressive millennials and reactionary skinheads. It's not exactly hard to choose sides here: Saulnier has hit on the same realisation that previously occurred to directors as disparate as Robert Aldrich, Steven Spielberg and Quentin Tarantino – which is, that you can have *carte blanche* for carnage as long as the antagonists self-identify via swastikas. And so *Green Room* is brutally, horrendously violent, never more so than in an early scene where the Ain't Rights – the band's name is a sly acknowledgement of their lefty sympathies, as is their decision to cover the Dead Kennedys' 'Nazi Punks Fuck Off' during their set – slice open one of the beefy Aryan Brotherhood thugs who have them trapped at gunpoint in the titular backstage area. The outrageousness of the bloodletting is tempered – or perhaps righteously amplified – by the identity and attitudes of the victim.

This is not to suggest that *Green Room* should have been more even-handed, of course. The enduring lesson of siege classics from *Assault on Precinct 13* to *The Raid* (both of which are evoked here) is that they work best in the absence of plausible psychology, to the point of turning the bad guys into full-on abstractions. And so Saulnier, canny entertainer that he is, has contrived a scenario in which any kind of subtlety can be sacrificed on the altar of rabble-raising. This is more of a crowd-pleaser than its predecessor, and while its basic, elemental



Skin game: Callum Turner, Anton Yelchin, Alia Shawkat

appeal is undeniable – to say nothing of its formal chops – it's also a tad programmatic. Where *Blue Ruin* problematised blood-lusting retribution, *Green Room* enshrines it, and thus goes down pretty easy despite all the high-calibre kill-shots and splintered limbs. (The makeup effects are consistently terrific; gore hounds will get their money's worth.)

Within this hothouse atmosphere, Patrick Stewart's non-campy, excellently measured performance as the neo-Nazis' leader is a bit beside the point, though he's well supported by *Blue Ruin* star Macon Blair as an increasingly desperate

underling. The lithe young actors playing the guitar-wielding heroes – including Anton Yelchin and Alia Shawkat – duly approximate fear and anger in between howling in pain from various devastating injuries. The only performer who really stands out against the chaos is Imogen Poots as a nervy rawk girl who joins forces with the Ain't Rights and lasts longer than her fragile physicality suggests. In a film where most of the people end up as props in gory slapstick set pieces, Poots displays an actorly tenacity that lines up smartly with her character's hardwired survival instincts. She holds her own. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Neil Kopp  
Anish Savjani  
Victor Moyers  
**Written by**  
Jeremy Saulnier  
**Director of Photography**  
Sean Porter  
**Edited by**  
Julia Bloch  
**Production Designer**  
Ryan Warren Smith  
**Music**  
Brooke Blair  
Will Blair  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Paul H. Maritsas  
**Costume Designer**  
Amanda Needham  
**Stunt Co-ordinator**  
Kent Luttrell  
**Production Companies**

A Broad Green Pictures and Film Science production  
A film by Jeremy Saulnier  
**Executive Producers**  
Gabriel Hammond  
Daniel Hammond  
Richard Russo  
Vincent Savino

**Cast**  
Anton Yelchin  
Pat  
Imogen Poots  
Amber  
Alia Shawkat  
Sam  
Joe Cole  
Reece  
Callum Turner  
Tiger  
Mark Webber  
Daniel  
Eric Edelstein

Big Justin  
Macon Blair  
Gabe  
Kai Lennox  
Clark  
Patrick Stewart  
Darcy Banker

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Altitude Film Entertainment

Oregon, the present. Cash-strapped punk group the Ain't Rights are booked at a club frequented by white supremacists. During their set, they incite the crowd by playing an anti-Nazi anthem, and are preparing to make a hasty exit when they witness a gang member murdering a young woman in the venue's green room. A tense standoff ensues during which the band members – led by singer Tiger – take one of the neo-Nazi hostage (and are forced to kill him). Meanwhile the group's leader, Darcy, negotiates with them from the other side of a barricaded door, claiming that it's all been a misunderstanding. Darcy plans to kill the band as soon as they let him in; once the group – along with sympathetic patron Amber – realise this, they devise a plan to escape. Bassist Pat is grievously wounded in the escape attempt. Darcy calls for reinforcements, including a pack of vicious dogs who hunt the band through the hallways of the now dark and deserted club. Both sides experience losses. Pat and Amber survive the ensuing massacre. Instead of fleeing, however, they follow Darcy and his remaining henchmen to a clearing in the wood, intending to finish them off.



## Hardcore Henry

USA/Russian Federation/People's Republic of China 2016  
Director: Ilya Naishuller  
Certificate 18 96m 19s

### Reviewed by Adam Nayman

Jean-Luc Godard famously said that the best way to criticise a movie was to make another movie. Watching the craven Russian-American co-production *Hardcore Henry*, it's as if writer-director Ilya Naishuller was working the other way around – trying to vindicate the oeuvre of Neveland/Taylor by showing what it would look like without finesse or cleverness. For where the vitally vulgar likes of *Crank* (2006) and *Gamer* (2009) burlesqued the brutality of videogames, *Hardcore Henry* directly mimics the morally blank space of a first-person shooter, in effect transferring the role of the hero to the viewer. It's a potentially audacious move, except that Naishuller, who pioneered a similar POV style in music videos for his Russian hardcore band Biting Elbows, isn't interested in the implications of this hyper-subjective aesthetic (ie, the way it seeks to leave audiences with blood on their hands). He's only thought about whether or not it looks cool. Which, to be fair, it does, at least for the first 30 minutes or so, after which the novelty of watching footage gleaned by stuntmen running around Moscow with GoPros mounted on their foreheads wears off with a vengeance.

Henry doesn't say a single word in the movie, and his muteness is one of several nods in the script to the format-specific storytelling techniques of videogames. When he's not fighting off scores of faceless henchmen, Henry is taking in large chunks of exposition from his wife Estelle (Haley Bennett), the sleek scientist who has mechanically reupholstered and then cybernetically rebooted his corpse as part of a biotech experiment; from telekinetic master criminal Akan (Danila Kozlovsky), who has kidnapped Estelle in an attempt to draw Henry out into the open; and from an eccentric helper figure



A clone again, naturally: Haley Bennett

named Jimmy (Sharlto Copley), who shows him how to recharge his batteries and keeps getting killed and popping up in new guises and accents (this gives the always game Copley a chance to play at being Peter Sellers, which he does not half badly).

The survive-at-all-costs plotline is just a pretext for carnage, of course, which is relentless, gory and smartly choreographed – a lot of guys took hard falls to get this thing made. And yet it's also all somehow weightless and underwhelming, possibly because the visual gimmickry necessitates so much CGI around the edges. The Moscow backdrop is at least novel for a mainstream, English-language action film, and Naishuller has an eye for locations – a brief idyll in the woods contrasts nicely with the urban blight, and Akan's towering HQ has a vertically integrated grandeur.

Naishuller also likes to try to show off his cinephile cred, with explicit references to Robert Montgomery's *Lady in the Lake*, (a poster for which is placed in the foreground of one camera set-up), as well as *RoboCop* and *A Clockwork Orange*. These nods are an attempt to place *Hardcore Henry* within a lineage of visionary popular thrillers, but there's nothing to see here. ☹

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Timur Bekmambetov  
Ilya Naishuller  
Inga Vainshtein Smith  
Ekaterina Kononenko

#### Written by

Ilya Naishuller  
Additional writing  
by Will Stewart

#### Directors of

#### Photography

Seva Kaptur  
Fedor Lyass  
Pasha Kapinos

#### Edited by

Steven Mirkovich  
Vlad Kaptur

#### Production Design

Margarita Ablaeva

#### Music

Dasha Charusha

#### Production

#### Sound Mixers

Aleksander Golubtsov  
Rostislav Kaptur  
Sergey Tishkin

#### Costume Design

Anna Kudovich

#### Visual Effects

Hy\*drau\*lx

VFX Legion

Zero VFX

Mad Old Nut

Productions, Inc.

Mammal Studios

Mighty Coconut LLC

Mr. Wolf

Cyborg Ant

Giant Propeller

Silo Enterprises, Inc.

Di-Vision

#### CGF

#### Stunt Choreography

Alexander Stetsenko  
Oleg Poddubnyi

#### Stunt Department

Co-ordinator

Alexey Nikolaev

@STX Productions, LLC

#### Production

#### Companies

An STX Entertainment

and Huayi Brothers

Pictures presentation

Timur Bekmambetov

presents a Bazelevs

and Versus Pictures

production

An Ilya Naishuller film

#### Executive Producers

Sharlto Copley

Will Stewart

Robert Simonds

Adam Fogelson

Oren Aviv

Donald Tang

Wang Zhongjun

Wang Zhonglei

Jerry Ye

Alex A. Ginzburg

Tony Lee

#### Cast

Sharlto Copley

Jimmy

Danila Kozlovsky

Akan

Haley Bennett

Estelle

Andrey Dementiev

Slick Dmitry

Dasha Charusha

Katya the dominatrix

Sveta Ustinova

Olga the dominatrix

Kirill Byrkin

rapist cop 1

Varvara Borodina

stoner's girlfriend

Polina Filonenko

rape victim

Ivan Isyanov

stoner

Ravshana Kurkova

shop girl

Sergei Mezentsev

brothel barman

Aleksandr Pal

Mr Fahrenheit

Oleg Poddubnyi

Yuri

Kirill Serebrennikov

tank driver 1

Sergei Shnurov

security guy

interacting with pliers

Tim Roth

Henry's father

Dolby Atmos

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor

Entertainment Film

Distributors Ltd

Moscow, the present. Henry wakes up in a water tank, missing an arm and a leg. He has new robotic limbs attached by his wife Estelle, a scientist who explains that he's lost his memory following an accident. Akan, a villain with telekinetic powers, arrives and tries to kill Henry and Estelle; after realising that he's on an airship, Henry makes it to an escape pod with Estelle and they crash to earth, where Estelle is taken prisoner. Henry meets Jimmy, an ally who tells him that he needs to recharge his power cells and sends him to kill Dmitry, who has a charging pump in his heart. Henry finds Dmitry and pulls the pump out, bringing it to Jimmy at a brothel. It turns out that there are multiple Jimmys;

after a series of chases and fights, Henry learns that Jimmy is a paralysed scientist who has created a series of flesh-and-blood surrogates after being brutalised by Akan. Jimmy agrees to help Henry storm Akan's compound to rescue Estelle. In the final fight, the Jimmy clones are all killed, as is the actual Jimmy; Henry takes out hundreds of similarly engineered super-soldiers, only to be easily bested by Akan. He learns that Estelle is in fact Akan's wife and the whole ordeal has been an attempt to implant in him feelings of rage and vengeance that can be passed on to a new cohort of super-soldiers. Furious, Henry decapitates Akan and shoots Estelle, who falls to her death from a helicopter.

## Hard Tide

United Kingdom/USA 2015  
Directors: Robert Osman, Nathanael Wiseman  
Certificate 15 79m 20s

### Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Actual fathers are absent, ineffectual or monstrous, but the paternal instinct is still a potentially redeeming force in this bloody melodrama, which pits an instinctively decent young man against a society that expects only badness from him. Nathanael Wiseman, who also co-scripted and co-directed with Robert Osman, is a persuasive presence in the central role of Jake, and aspects of his character's predicament ring grimly true: the clash between his desire for stability and his mistrust of all authority; his misplaced loyalty to the dim, hot-headed best friend who represents the only continuity in his life; and his unwilling but frequent recourse to violence in the absence of other life skills. That these are well-worn clichés of the gangster genre doesn't make them any less potent; and Wiseman's performance, backed by convincing production values, succeeds in lending them added force.

Unfortunately, the film manages other aspects of its determinedly torrid story with rather less aplomb. It's another tested movie trope to have Jake impetuously undertake the care of a neglected child: from *The Kid* (1921) to *Paper Moon* (1973) to *Léon* (1994), shabby sorts have been humanised by being placed in loco parentis, and the addition of an imperilled youngster is a reliable way to secure some moral clarity in the event that your other characters pretty much seem to deserve each other. Here, however, nine-year-old Jade (Alexandra Newick) never seems more than a prop. Her improbable sang-froid at finding herself in the care of strangers saves the film from having to concern itself overly with the morality of Jake's behaviour, but hopelessly compromises the authenticity of the story for any viewer who knows what caring for an upset child is actually like. And having Jake relate the half-remembered plot of *The Lord of the Rings* as a bedtime story feels like a distinctly misplaced bid for cute laughs when one considers that his actions have inadvertently consigned her to orphanhood. Some of the sentimentality the film indulges in elsewhere – as when



Thug at the heartstrings: Wiseman, Newick



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it shows us just what a good substitute dad Jake is via a hackneyed happy-day-at-the-fairground montage – might have been better deployed here. Having Jade dressed in a superhero outfit throughout was presumably intended as an indie-movie affectation (and a reference to Jake's improbable heroism – the film's original title was *My Hero*) but it comes off more as an admission that the filmmakers weren't sure how to make her interesting in herself.

The unreliability and moral flimsiness of the official bodies meant to look out for children is a pertinent and challenging aspect of the narrative, and one that could have stood more complex attention. Jade's social worker Mary (Beverly Hills) appears as fussily maternal a presence as any motherless child could wish for, but her inattentiveness and slapdash information-gathering almost prove fatal – and are themselves implicitly the consequences of the declining status and funding of her profession. That the film seems indecisive about whether Mary represents salvation or further trouble for Jade might be seen as another weakness of its narrative, but can more generously be regarded as a sincere effort to represent the very real ambivalence in the relationship between at-risk individuals and state-assigned carers. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Producers</b> Katarina Gellin Nathanael Wiseman	with Aldamisa Entertainment	<b>Kat Gellin</b> Kim
<b>Written by</b> Robert Osman Nathanael Wiseman	<b>Executive Producers</b> Anna-Karina Thomson	<b>Veronica Trickett</b> Leanne
<b>Cinematography</b> Joseph Mannion	<b>Producers</b> Gary Thomson Julie Hunter White	<b>Beverly Hills</b> Mary
<b>Editor</b> PJ Harley	<b>Kevin Hunter White</b> Oliver White	<b>Grant Davis</b> Jade's dad
<b>Production Design</b> Justine Cullen	<b>Willy Cadogan</b> Edward Chelsea	<b>Andy Lucas</b> Old Man Flowers
<b>Original Score</b> Si Begg	<b>Cast</b> Nathanael Wiseman	<b>Ralph Brown</b> Gaz
<b>Wardrobe</b> Chloe Heatley	<b>Jake</b> Alexandra Newick	<b>Dolby Digital</b> In Colour [2.35:1]
<b>©Redeeming Features</b>	<b>Jade</b> Mem Ferda	<b>Distributor</b> Metrodome Distribution Ltd
<b>Production Companies</b> Redeeming Features presents in association	<b>Simon Flowers</b> Oliver Stark Alfie Fisher	

Margate, the present. Jake and Alfie are minor drug dealers working for Jake's semi-estranged father. Local hood Simon Flowers wants them to join his operation; Alfie is keen, but Jake is reluctant. Jake intervenes in a fight between a young girl, Jade, and her alcoholic father. He babysits the girl, but on delivering her home he scuffles with her father, who falls, hits his head and dies. Jake takes Jade home with him. The next day they run into Jade's social worker, Mary, and Jake claims to be Jade's cousin. Alfie's girlfriend Leanne and Jake's girlfriend Kim help Jake to look after Jade, but Alfie gets out a bag of ecstasy tablets, and Jade takes one. Jake and Kim take her to hospital, and Jake leaves Kim there with her. Alfie, angry at Jake's refusal to ramp up their business and jealous of Jade, sets Jake up to be killed by Flowers; but Flowers kills Alfie instead. While Jake meets with Mary, Flowers kidnaps Jade from the hospital. Jake pursues him to the flower shop he runs with his elderly father. As they fight, Flowers's father shoots Flowers in the back and then shoots himself. The police restore Jade to Kim and Mary, and take Jake away.

## The Huntsman Winter's War

USA/Japan 2015  
Director: Cedric Nicolas-Troyan  
Certificate 12A 113m 57s

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

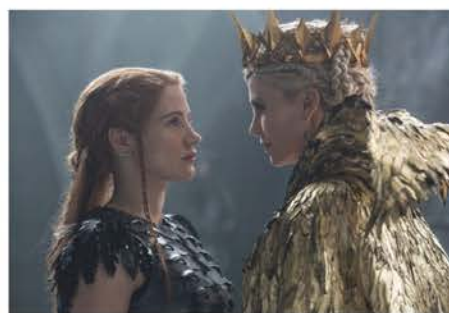
Under the portentous narration, eye-popping visual effects and lavish costuming, a dark secret languishes: this is a film made up of leftovers. An overcooked prequel-cum-sequel to 2012's fairytale *Snow White and the Huntsman*, it reassembles what remains (Chris Hemsworth's Eric the Huntsman, the kingdom of Tabor), reanimates what is vital (evil Queen Ravenna) and skips over what is lost (Kristen Stewart's Saint Joan-ish Snow White) in a blustering attempt to establish a fantasy franchise. Around these puffed-up fragments, the film builds a new story landscape: the northern stronghold of ice-queen Freya, runaway sister of Ravenna and creator of the army of Huntsmen.

Splitting the narrative between the two realms, the film's new ingredients draw on elements proven elsewhere. There's more than a hint of *Frozen* in Freya's instant-ice powers, a pinch of *Willow* in Eric's warrior wife Sara (Jessica Chastain) and a junior *Game of Thrones* look to the child-Huntsmen's training and fight scenes. The film feels self-consciously assembled to appeal to the teen/tween core audience.

Salomong between the rivalry of the sister queens, the tragic end of Eric and Sara's love and a quest for the stolen magic mirror (now inhabited by Ravenna), the plot jumps timeframes and dodges inconvenient implausibilities. Keen on narrative shocks, it depends heavily on reanimating characters after startling 'deaths'. Overcomplicated and unfocused, it fails to establish emotional depth either in Ravenna and Freya's bond or in Eric and Sara's hurried courtship. First-time director and special-effects specialist Cedric Nicolas-Troyan papers over the cracks with elaborate CGI effects for the battles and for the queens' powers. But the giant goblins' forest fights and the slither of molten gold that hatches into a reborn Ravenna are reiterations of scenes in the previous film, with a subsequent dwindling of dramatic or visual impact. Empty spectacle is the order of the day.

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Joe Roth	<b>©Universal Studios</b>	<b>Gryff</b>
<b>Written by</b> Evan Spiliotopoulos Craig Mazin	<b>Production Companies</b> Universal Pictures presents in association with Perfect World Pictures a Roth Films production	<b>Jessica Chastain</b> Sara
<b>Based on characters created by Evan Daugherty</b>	<b>Presented in association with Dentsu Inc./ Fuji Television Network, Inc.</b>	<b>Sheridan Smith</b> Mrs Bromwyn
<b>Director of Photography</b> Phedon Papamichael	<b>Executive Producers</b> Sarah Bradshaw Palak Patel	<b>Alexandra Roach</b> Doreena
<b>Edited by</b> Conrad Buff	<b>Cast</b>	<b>Dolby Digital</b> In Colour [2.35:1]
<b>Production Designer</b> Dominic Watkins	<b>Chris Hemsworth</b> Eric, the huntsman	<b>Some screenings presented in 3D</b>
<b>Music</b> James Newton Howard	<b>Charlize Theron</b> Queen Ravenna	<b>Distributor</b> Universal Pictures International UK & Ire
<b>Re-recording Mixer</b> Jon Taylor	<b>Emily Blunt</b> Queen Freya	
<b>Costume Designer</b> Colleen Atwood	<b>Nick Frost</b> Nion	
<b>Visual Effects</b> Double Negative Pixomondo	<b>Sam Claflin</b> Prince William	
<b>The Mill</b> Digital Domain	<b>Rob Brydon</b>	
<b>Stunt Co-ordinator</b> Ben Cooke		



Warrior/queen: Jessica Chastain, Charlize Theron

This CGI déjà vu is also a side effect of the general Tolkienisation of fantasy and fairytale films, whose monsters, morphing and battles now seem interchangeable, merging *Maleficent* into *Snow White and the Huntsman* or *Into the Woods*.

Nick Frost and Rob Brydon's CGI-shortened wisecracking dwarves provide the humour lacking from the previous film, greatly helped by Sheridan Smith's engagingly brassy robber-dwarf. But without that icon of teen moodiness Kristen Stewart, one wonders whom the young audience will root for. Even setting aside Hemsworth and Chastain's equally wobbly Scottish-via-Irish accents, Eric and Sara's death-did-us-part love affair lacks chemistry, and Emily Blunt's damaged Freya lacks conviction. All the onscreen energy resides with Charlize Theron's sumptuously monstrous Queen Ravenna, whose opulent costumes fling out golden birds and fatal black-glass tentacles. The film fades for the long stretch that she's absent, bursting to life as she unleashes her will to power. Catching the Huntsman's arrow like a fly, she coos "I've missed you" with a coy menace that sets a match to the scene. Her aggressive glamour is the film's most potent force, her power-hungry manner unabashedly self-determining ("I wanted love and a child – but I have a higher calling"). An unlikely role model perhaps, but a horribly compelling one. Ⓢ

Long ago in the kingdom of Tabor. Freya, sister of evil Queen Ravenna, develops magical ice powers after her lover kills their baby. She abandons the kingdom and builds an ice palace in the north, where she creates an army of child-warriors. Two of these warriors, Eric and Sara, fall in love, although it is forbidden. When they are caught, Eric is led to believe that Sara has been killed. He escapes to Ravenna's kingdom.

Seven years later, the magic mirror has been stolen. Eric and dwarves Gryff and Nion are sent to reclaim it. Sara rescues Eric from a Huntsmen raid, having escaped from Freya's dungeons. Teaming up with dwarves Mrs Bromwyn and Doreena, the gang recover the mirror from a goblin stronghold after a battle. Freya appears and claims the mirror – Sara has been her spy. Sara's arrow only stuns Eric, despite Freya's order to kill him. At Freya's castle, Freya summons Ravenna back from the dead, from out of the mirror. Eric breaks into the castle. Ravenna takes over Freya's army and admits that she put a spell on Freya's lover to make him kill their child – the mirror had predicted that the baby would be more beautiful than her. The sisters fight and Freya is mortally wounded. Eric fights Ravenna. Freya freezes the mirror and Eric smashes it with his axe. Ravenna splinters and dies. Eric and Sara are reunited, as are the dwarf couples. They liberate Freya's child army.



# I Saw the Light

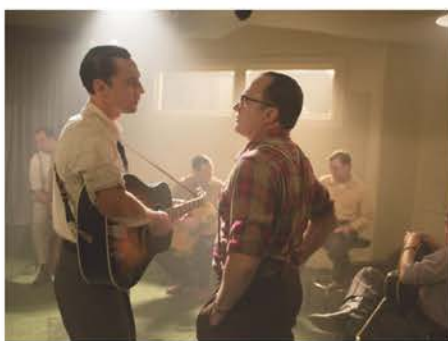
USA 2015  
Director: Marc Abraham  
Certificate 15 123m 34s

## Reviewed by Frances Morgan

With *High-Rise* only recently in cinemas, *I Saw the Light* can't help but draw attention to Tom Hiddleston's physical versatility. The English actor, last seen as buff yuppie Robert Laing in Ben Wheatley's film, now inhabits the lean frame of Hank Williams. He portrays the American country singer, who suffered from chronic back pain throughout his short life, as a man desperately uncomfortable in his own skin, for whom the release brought about by performing is exhilarating but brief. Drinking – Williams's other panacea – is shown mostly as the mundane, dissociative necessity that it undoubtedly was for the singer, who died from a heart attack in 1953 aged only 29, alone in the back seat of his prized blue Cadillac en route to a gig. As the younger Williams, Hiddleston recalls Joaquin Phoenix's volatile Johnny Cash in *Walk the Line* (2005). But by the end of the film, the music star he most resembles is David Bowie in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976), as he shrinks into increasingly ostentatious clothes that emphasise rather than mask his physical and emotional fragility.

Hiddleston's alienated presence is an exotic note in this otherwise rather generic portrait of a musician's rise and fall. *I Saw the Light* has the hallmarks of the faithful music biopic, marking each chapter with the date and location. Inevitably, we see the genesis of key compositions, most poignantly 'Your Cheatin' Heart'. There are touches of documentary *vérité*, such as reconstructed super 8 footage from a tour, staged interviews with Williams's mentor Fred Rose (played by Bradley Whitford) and real footage from Williams's funeral. These gestures of authenticity are jarring and suggest a lack of confidence that is unwarranted, given the film's attentive production design and musical direction.

The musical sequences are particularly well realised. Williams's band, the Drifting Cowboys, are played for the most part by musicians, emphasising the importance of the band to Williams's signature electrified country-blues sound. Hiddleston's singing is too effusive, somehow too big, when compared with Hank's



Hank account: Tom Hiddleston, Bradley Whitford

melancholy, Sacred Harp-schooled delivery. Yet he convinces as Williams's spoken-word alter ego, Luke the Drifter, in whose guise he delivers a moralistic monologue about divorce at an open-air festival, clearly the worse for wear. Despite its obvious inclusion as a way of telegraphing Williams's own marital troubles, the scene has a sun-bleached bleakness that transcends the narrative.

Hank and his wife Audrey's troubled relationship and its aftermath are central to *I Saw the Light*, but at times one feels as if Abraham would have been more comfortable focusing on the workings of the music industry of the 1940s and 50s. Elizabeth Olsen sympathetically conveys Audrey's energy and frustration, and excels at the difficult feat of singing badly (Audrey was a keen but unskilled singer). But she is required too often to play the ambitious, deluded nag. Given the involvement of Williams's biographer Colin Escott in the film, it's unfortunate that Audrey's influence on Hank's career – it was she who pushed him towards Nashville and Fred Rose – isn't properly acknowledged. The same goes for Hank's mother Lillie (Cherry Jones), who nurtured her son's talent from his early teens. The complex dynamic between these key figures in Williams's life is rendered in broad strokes, as if replicating his own bruised views on women and family, and was explored with more subtlety in Escott and Morgan Neville's 2010 TV documentary *Honky Tonk Blues*. **S**

# Jane Got a Gun

USA 2015  
Director: Gavin O'Connor  
Certificate 15 98m 4s

## Reviewed by Kate Stables

"The western struggles and strains to cast out everything feminine," cultural critic Jane Tompkins asserted, of this most masculine of genres. Despite a significant seam of female-centred western features (from Texas Guinan in 1918's *The Gun Woman* onwards), on screen the Wild West's women are crammed into wife and whore archetypes, with occasional excursions into tomboy or cattle-baroness territory.

In this instance, despite the titillating Aerosmith-derived title, the eponymous Jane (Natalie Portman) is no *The Quick and The Dead*-style gunslinger. By the time Ewan McGregor and his Bishop Boys gang descend on her New Mexico homestead to wreak vengeance on her and bullet-riddled husband Ham, she has already run the girl-gamut as fiancée, single mother, rape victim, whore and wifely homemaker. One of the small enjoyments of this otherwise dutifully predictable film is watching her swap housewifery for warfare, turning her pickle jars into nail bombs – supervised by Joel Edgerton's embittered one-time fiancé Dan, of course, for this is a romantic western, where Jane's relationships receive more focus than the action. The film's fatal flaw is the consequent sticky slew of flashbacks during Jane and Dan's siege preparations, explaining their youthful Missouri romance and Jane's exploitation by the Bishop gang. This dissipates any tension building for the upcoming battle, as does the couple's terse bickering, which makes one nostalgic for the resonant cynicism and regret of *Johnny Guitar*'s ex-lovers.

In addition, Brian Duffield's script (with contributions from Edgerton and Anthony Tambakis) feels pulled in several directions. It's hard to reconcile the tough, *Unforgiven*-style central core with the soft-focus romantic backstory or the implausible happy-families conclusion. DP Mandy Walker's visual scheme to distinguish past from present – heat and red dust versus golden light in rustling fields – exacerbates this uneven mix. Gavin O'Connor, who took the film over after a famously unhappy false start, directs solidly and unflashily, with a fair sprinkling of western tropes, including an early nod to the doorway shots of *The Searchers* (1956). A couple of his set pieces (a fusillade of star-like night-time bullet flares, a firestorm from an exploding booby trap) hit home, but the film is otherwise saggy and uninvolved, despite its lean 98 minutes.

Part of the problem is the dry, fear-tinged stoicism of Jane herself, echoing the quiet female tenacity of *Meek's Cutoff* (2010) rather than the abandoned despair of *The*



Gun girl: Natalie Portman

## Credits and Synopsis

### Produced by

Marc Abraham  
G. Marq Roswell  
Brett Ratner  
Aaron L. Gilbert

### Written by

Marc Abraham  
Based on the book  
Hank Williams:  
the Biography by  
Colin Escott with  
George Merritt,  
William MacEwen

### Director of

### Photography

Dante Spinotti

### Edited by

Alan Heim

### Production Designer

Merideth Boswell

### Music

Aaron Zigman

### Production

Sound Mixer

Steve C. Aaron

### Costume Designer

Lahly Poore-Ericson

@RatPac ISTL  
LLC and I Saw the  
Light Movie, LLC

### Production

Companies

Sony Pictures  
Classics and RatPac  
Entertainment  
present in association  
with CW Media  
Finance a Bron

Studios and RatPac

Entertainment

production

### Executive Producers

Patty Long  
James Packer  
John Raymonds  
David Gendron  
Michael Hansen  
Jason Cloth  
Andy Pollack  
Gary Slaight  
Alan Simpson

### Cast

Tom Hiddleston  
Hank Williams  
Elizabeth Olsen  
Audrey Williams  
Cherry Jones  
Lillie Williams  
Bradley Whitford  
Fred Rose  
Maddie Hasson  
Billie Jean Jones  
Wrenn Schmidt  
Bobbie Jett

### David Krumholtz

James Dolan  
Josh Pais  
Dore Schary

In Colour and  
Black & White  
[2.35:1]

Distributor  
Sony Pictures  
Releasing UK

Alabama, 1944. Hank Williams and Audrey Mae Sheppard are married by a local registrar in the office of a gas station. The 21-year-old Williams is a country-and-western singer who has a regular slot on local radio with his band, the Drifting Cowboys. His mother Lillie acts as his manager. Williams visits Nashville and meets music publisher Fred Rose, who helps him secure a record deal. Although Williams finds success, his drinking becomes a problem, and his relationship with Audrey runs into difficulties.

Williams finally achieves his ambition of performing at the legendary Grand Ole Opry. His alcoholism worsens, exacerbated by chronic back pain caused by spina bifida, and he and Audrey divorce. His unreliability causes him to lose his slot at the Grand Ole Opry.

Shortly after his marriage to Billie Jean Jones in 1952, Williams suffers a fatal heart attack while being driven to a New Year's Day show in Ohio. When his death is announced at the concert, the audience joins the musicians in singing his song 'I Saw the Light'.



**Homesman** (2014). Portman gives a tense, tight-lipped performance, and she and a fidgety Edgerton feel hamstrung by a script that puts period dress on contemporary mores. McGregor, unrecognisable as a Dan Duryea-ish villain, needs more legroom than his story slivers afford him. Despite the fact that he spends most of the movie dying, the film's standout is Noah Emmerich, whose death-dealing brothel-rescue of Jane is queasily exhilarating: this two-handed blazing six-gun sequence is the revisionist western the film hankers to be, a grim, high-body-count, gun-obsessed *High Noon* whose vendetta makes Portman a kind of petticoat Gary Cooper in her Stetson and skirts. Instead we get the female western that the current culture demands. After the 70s rape revenge of *Hannie Caulder* and the 90s new feminism of *Bad Girls*, *Jane Got a Gun*, with its wife/mother/siege partner/revenger, is surely the 'having it all' post-eminist western for the 2010s. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Natalie Portman  
Aleen Keshishian  
Zack Schiller  
Mary Regency Boies  
Scott Steindorff  
Scott LaStaiti  
Terry Douglas  
**Screenplay**  
Brian Duffield  
Anthony Tambakis  
Joel Edgerton  
**Story**  
Brian Duffield  
**Director of Photography**  
Mandy Walker  
**Film Editor**  
Alan Cody  
**Production Designers**  
Tim Grimes  
Jim Oberlander  
**Music**  
Lisa Gerrard  
Marcello De Francisci  
**Sound Mixers**

David Brownlow  
Bayard Carey  
**Costume Designers**  
Catherine George  
Terry Anderson  
©Jane Got a Gun  
Productions, LLC  
**Production Companies**  
Boies/Schiller  
Films presents in  
association with  
Exclusive Media a  
Boies/Schiller Film  
Group, 1821 Pictures.  
Handsomecharlie  
Films, Stone Village  
production in  
association with  
Straight Up Films  
A film by Gavin  
O'Connor  
**Executive Producers**  
David Boies  
Dylan Russell

Chris Coen  
Paris Latsis  
Jason Rose

#### Cast

**Natalie Portman**  
Jane Hammond  
**Joel Edgerton**  
Dan Frost  
**Noah Emmerich**  
Bill Hammond  
**Rodrigo Santoro**  
Fitchum  
**Boyd Holbrook**  
Vic Owen  
**Ewan McGregor**  
John Bishop

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Lionsgate UK

New Mexico, 1871. Former outlaw 'Ham' Hammond, shot and injured by the Bishop Boys gang, returns to his wife Jane and daughter Katie at their remote cabin. They have been hunted by the gang for years. Jane hides Katie with a neighbour and enlists reluctant neighbour Dan Frost to defend her homestead.

Flashbacks show Jane and Dan as Missouri sweethearts, parted by the Civil War. Joining the Bishop Boys' wagon train heading west, Jane was raped and prostituted by them, and her baby daughter Mary killed on leader John Bishop's orders. Gang member Ham rescued Jane and they fled. An angry Dan tracked Jane down but refused to confront her.

Jane shoots a gang member who finds her in the local town. Dan helps her assemble siege explosives. The Bishop Boys search the valley; Dan shoots the gang scout who finds them. Dan taunts the failing Ham, but Jane refuses to leave him. The Bishop Boys attack at night. Dan and Jane are wounded. The couple shoot most of the gang in Dan's explosion-rigged trench. John Bishop threatens to burn them out, and shoots Ham. Drawing his gun on Dan, he is surprised when Jane threatens him. He claims that Mary is alive. Jane shoots him. Dan and Jane find Mary unharmed at Bishop's brothel. Jane collects the rewards on the dead Bishop Boys. She, Dan and her daughters leave for a new life.

## Journey to the Shore

Japan/France 2015  
Director: Kurosawa Kiyoshi



The talking dead: Fukatsu Eri

### Reviewed by Tony Rayns

Kurosawa Kiyoshi has been interested in ghosts from the off – his first palpable success in Japan was the 1992 supernatural horror thriller *The Guard from Underground* (*Jigoku no Keibinin*) – but it took him a good decade and a half to realise that arty, unresolved variations on genre-schlock plots were unlikely to win him the international acclaim he was reaching for. Spurred on by his sometime teacher (and reliable supporter) Hasumi Shigehiko, Kurosawa has gradually shifted from incoherent pessimism to sentimental certainty, and has the Cannes prizes to show for it. Cases in point: 2008's *Tokyo Sonata*, winner of the Un Certain Regard jury prize, and now 2015's *Journey to the Shore*, winner of the Un Certain Regard 'Best Director'

prize. Ironically, Thierry Frémaux and his team of Cannes selectors time after time embrace Kore-eda Hirokazu as their Japanese director of choice for competition, despite his steady retreat from his arthouse niche, while relegating Kurosawa to Un Certain Regard, presumably because they see him – alongside Miike – as an ambitious stalwart of genre cinema. (What they see in the work of Kawase Naomi, meanwhile, remains a riddle wrapped in an enigma.)

Kurosawa's adaptation of Yumoto Kazumi's deeply sentimental chick-lit novel *Kishibe no Tabi* (2010) reunites insecure, middle-aged widow Mizuki (Fukatsu Eri) with her late husband Yusuke (Asano Tadanobu), a dentist who drowned himself in the sea off Toyama after discovering that he was sick. Yusuke has spent the three years

### Credits and Synopsis

**Screenplay**  
Ujita Takashi  
Kurosawa Kiyoshi  
Adapted from the original novel  
*Kishibe no Tabi* by  
Yumoto Kazumi  
**Director of Photography**  
Ashizawa Akiko  
**Editor**  
Imai Tsuyoshi  
**Production Designer**  
Ataka Norifumi

**Music**  
Otomo Yoshihide  
Eto Naoko  
**Sound Design**  
Matsumoto Showa  
**Costumes**  
Ogawa Kumiko  
©Journey to the  
Shore Production  
Committee, Comme  
des Cinémas  
**Production Companies**

Showgate, Amuse,  
Wowow Films, Pony  
Canyon, Hakuhodo,  
Office Shiroas  
and Comme des  
Cinémas present  
A film by Kurosawa  
Kiyoshi  
With the participation  
of Aide aux Cinémas  
du Monde, Centre  
national du cinéma  
et de l'image animée,  
Ministère des

Affaires étrangères  
et du Développement  
international,  
Institut français  
**Executive Producers**  
Sawada Masa  
Matsuda Hiroko

**Cast**  
**Fukatsu Eri**  
Mizuki  
**Asano Tadanobu**  
Yusuke

**Komatsu Masao**  
Mr Shimakage  
**Aoi Yu**  
Tomoko  
**Emoto Akira**  
Mr Hoshitani  
**Okunuki Kaoru**  
Hoshiya Kaoru  
**Muraoka Nozomi**  
Fujie  
**Akahori Masaaki**  
Takashi  
**Dolby Digital**

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
**Subtitles**  
**Distributor**  
Eureka  
Entertainment Ltd

Japan, the present. Dentist Yabuuchi Yusuke, dead for three years, returns to his wife Mizuki and offers to take her to beautiful places where he's stayed – and left unfinished business – since his death. First stop is Yaga, a country town where Yusuke helped Mr Shimakage with his paper round. Shimakage (also dead) has been bereft since his wife left; he collapses when he recalls how he violently abused her. They next visit restaurateurs Mr Jinnai and his partner Ms Fujie; Fujie deeply regrets her unkindness to her kid sister Mako, a piano student who died aged ten. Mizuki triggers Fujie's memories by playing the piano; Mako returns and plays her party piece 'Harmony of the Angels' perfectly. Mizuki reveals that she knows Yusuke once had an affair

with dental nurse Matsuzaki Tomoko; she returns home alone and arranges a meeting with Tomoko – who is now cheerful, married and pregnant. Yusuke reappears and brings Mizuki to a village where he stayed with Mr Hoshitani and taught popular adult-education classes in theoretical physics. Ryota, son of Hoshitani's widowed daughter-in-law Kaoru, spends much time at a waterfall that conceals a portal to the next world. Mizuki's late father visits her beside the waterfall and advises her to have no more to do with Yusuke. Kaoru's twisted husband Takashi returns to take control of her, but Yusuke fights him off. After teaching one last class, the weakened Yusuke prepares to return to the other world, but promises Mizuki that he will see her again.



## The Jungle Book

USA 2016

Director: Jon Favreau

Certificate PG 105m 40s

### Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

Disney's new version of *The Jungle Book* remakes a 49-year-old cartoon using post-*Avatar* technology. Directed by Jon Favreau (*Iron Man*), the film was largely made in CGI, with the live-action elements filmed on a Los Angeles soundstage. The resulting jungle adventure is spectacular, often exciting and fairly enjoyable, but it's also misconceived.

It constantly stirs memory of the old cartoon, replicating numerous backgrounds and famed songs from Disney's breeziest, funniest picture. Yet this remake turns *The Jungle Book* into an intense adventure, full of (bloodless) violence and peril that may upset much of its target family audience. Surely not *every* tot has been inured to nightmares by watching *The Dark Knight* and *The Hunger Games*? For older viewers, it may feel conceptually incoherent because of its ties to the cartoon.

The basic story is the same. Mowgli (child actor Neel Sethi, in his first big role) has been raised from infancy in the jungle by wolves, but is threatened by the human-hating tiger Shere Khan. The film follows Mowgli's adventures as the animals try to take him to safety. In the 1967 cartoon, Mowgli was a pigheaded brat; the new film gives him a proper story arc, starting out as a similarly annoying kid but ending up a cunning, fearless hero, like the Mowgli in the Rudyard Kipling stories.

Repeatedly, though, the threats to Mowgli are magnified. The 'bad' animals are monster-sized and unfunny, from the boy-eating snake Kaa (voiced by Scarlett Johansson) to an almost Kong-sized King Louie (voiced by Christopher Walken). Louie has to sing an unconvincing 'I Wanna Be Like You', but then goes into a full monster-movie act, smashing his way through dark stone ruins in pursuit of Mowgli. Without the song just before it,



Ace of cubs: Neel Sethi

the scene might have worked. But with the song effectively overlaying the jolly *Jungle Book* cartoon on top of the scene we're watching, it feels almost paradoxically wrong, like a *Mad* magazine vision of a Disney horror film. (I say this as a defender of Disney's scary *Return to Oz*, 1985, which never tried to imitate the *Wizard of Oz* musical.)

Of course, the film isn't all dark. There's a palpable lightening in palette and tone when Baloo is introduced as a lugubrious, honey-loving sloth bear voiced by Bill Murray. This slouchy CG animal is certainly appealing and, though oversized and ursine, evokes Murray's presence. But while this Baloo is amusing enough, he's not as charismatic, expressive or even as well written as the 1967 version voiced by Phil Harris. The CG jungle and animals are perfectly convincing, but very seldom do they have the anthropomorphic effect created by animators such as Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston. As the sole human character, Mowgli is never more than scrappy and plucky – which, in fairness, is a great improvement on the cartoon Mowgli.

The 1967 *The Jungle Book* was despised by many critics in its day, partly because it had so little respect for the Kipling stories. The new version doesn't feel much like Kipling either – the jungle characters still speak in colloquial Americanisms, with none of the 'thees' or 'thys' of Kipling's prose. (The dialogue in the recent *The Witch* was closer.) However, the script incorporates a bit more of Kipling, with the wolves' 'Law of the Jungle' song and a scene of predators and prey drinking together in a 'water truce' during a parched summer. Both elements come from Kipling's *The Second Jungle Book*, published in 1895.

A sequence in which monkeys hurtle Mowgli through treetops captures some of the vigour of Kipling's prose, though it still falls short. A buffalo stampede might also have come from the books, but it's equally close to Disney's *The Lion King* (1994), which seems to have influenced some of the remake's plot. (In the new version, Shere Khan murders Mowgli's adoptive wolf father Akela to set up a revenge story.) Such elements marry up well enough; yet the whole film, so redolent of its cartoon predecessor and yet so tonally different, feels like a wrongheaded mismatch. 🐼

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Jon Favreau  
Brigham Taylor

#### Screenplay

Justin Marks

Based on the books

by Rudyard Kipling

#### Director of

Photography

Bill Pope

#### Film Editor

Mark Livolsi

#### Production

Designer

Christopher Glass

#### Music

John Debnay

#### Costume Designer

Laura Jean Shannon

#### Visual Effects

MPC

#### Visual Effects

& Animation

Created by

WETA Digital Limited

Stunt Co-

#### ordinators

Thomas Robinson  
Harper  
Casey O'Neill

#### @Disney

Enterprises, Inc.

#### Production

Companies

Disney presents

a Fairview

Entertainment

production

A Jon Favreau film

#### Executive

Producers

Peter Tobbyansen

Molly Allen

Karen Gilchrist

#### Cast

Bill Murray

voice of Baloo

Ben Kingsley

voice of Bagheera

#### Idris Elba

voice of Shere Khan

Lupita Nyong'o

voice of Raksha

Scarlett Johansson

voice of Kaa

Giancarlo Esposito

voice of Akela

Christopher Walken

voice of King Louie

Neel Sethi

Mowgli

#### Dolby Atmos

In Colour

[1.85:1]

#### Some screenings

presented in 3D

#### Distributor

Buena Vista

International (UK)

In an Indian jungle, the human boy Mowgli has been raised by wolves. The tiger Shere Khan wants to kill him, so panther Bagheera tries to guide Mowgli to a human village. They're separated, and Mowgli has several perilous adventures. Eventually, he learns that Shere Khan has taken over the wolf pack, and goes back to fight him. Using his cunning and Man's 'red flower' (fire), Mowgli defeats Shere Khan and stays with his animal friends in the jungle.

since his death in revenant limbo, living and working in various small-town and countryside locations, helping other ghosts and/or their living relatives to come to terms with death and loss. His initial motive in returning to Mizuki is to use her personality and her piano-playing skills to help resolve problems he has encountered since he died. He first introduces her to the ghost of a newspaper deliveryman, wrongly thinking that she might resemble the wife who left him, and Mizuki inadvertently helps the man to remember the domestic abuse that drove his wife away. Recovering these memories enables him to leave this world, whereupon his home/office (like two key settings in Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu Monogatari*, 1953) shows its true state of dereliction.

Mizuki scores another success at their second stop; her presence enables the ghost of a ten-year-old girl to return and to play – flawlessly – the piano piece 'Harmony of the Angels', which once drove the girl's elder sister to slap her. (Piano-playing always brings out Kurosawa's embarrassing 'angelic' tendencies; see *Tokyo Sonata*.) The film then detours into a tediously superficial episode about the trouble in Yusuke and Mizuki's marriage before his death: he had an affair with dental nurse Tomoko, who turns out to be now happily married and pregnant. This revelation rekindles Yusuke's feelings for Mizuki and leads the film into its grand finale in a mountain village which conveniently contains a secret portal to the netherworld. Here Mizuki encounters the still-unreliable ghost of her father and Yusuke (who briefly resumes his gig teaching theoretical physics to the villagers) deals with the still-possessive and controlling ghost of a young woman's husband. So the story's overall arc becomes the loving reconciliation of Yusuke and Mizuki, expressed rather crudely through Yusuke's agreement to have sex with his wife, having earlier refused her.

Describing the storyline in this way brings out its underlying poverty, which suits Kurosawa's chronic failure to find the psychological truths of his characters and the ease of his recourse to reflex emotional triggers. But the film has qualities that partly offset its schematic, easy-option plotting. Kurosawa has always used long takes and wide-angle compositions to simultaneously camouflage and express his inability to get close to his characters, and here his studiously tranquil pacing and artful imagery give the film an undeniable weight. Whether he's stopping the action to admire the way that paper flowers flutter down from a disintegrating collage, seen in golden light, or evoking the placid tedium of a train journey, or staging action in depth to show a village community's engrossed reaction to a pop-science lecture, Kurosawa builds a slow-cinema discourse which cleverly creates a synthetic sense of profundity. What he's reaching for, of course, is the actual profundity of such films as *Ugetsu Monogatari* and Obayashi Nobuhiko's *The Discarnates* (*Ijintachi tonu Natsu*, 1988), which bring ghosts and people together to explore very human delusions and griefs. *Journey to the Shore* can't compare with those classics, but the film's imitation of life gains from spot-on casting and from its commitment to a largely visual aesthetic. 🐼



# Knight of Cups

USA 2014

Director: Terrence Malick

Certificate 15 117m 57s

See Feature  
on page 44

## Reviewed by Brad Stevens

Since Terrence Malick has implicitly aligned himself with a distinguished group of reclusive American authors, an attempt to comprehend

his oeuvre might usefully begin by considering the precise nature of this retreat. Is Malick, like J.D. Salinger, an artist who just happens to be a recluse, or could his meticulously curated withdrawal actually be a form of theatre relating to his thematic concerns, à la Thomas Pynchon? Connected with this question are those gaps that have increasingly come to define Malick: the 20-year hiatus between his second and third features, as well as the now customary two-year break between principal photography and final cut. *Knight of Cups* has fallen into yet another gap. Filmed in 2012 (a billboard advertising that year's remake of *Total Recall* is visible in one shot), it bears a 2014 copyright date, but it premiered at the Berlin Film Festival in February 2015, and is only now limping into British and American cinemas.

Considered alongside the mostly dismissive reviews it has so far received, this suggests that Malick will have trouble securing funding for such uncompromising work in future (though *Weightless*, shot back-to-back with *Knight* and featuring several of the same actors, awaits release). But the biggest gap here, and the one that may position Malick's vanishing act as part of some greater plan, is the one between viewing and comprehension. His last few films – perhaps most notably *To the Wonder* (2012) – can feel frustratingly disorganised when seen for the first time. While this has caused many commentators to dismiss them as incompetent or pretentious, it more likely results from our tendency to perceive unfamiliar, unconventional or innovative styles as chaotic, simply because we have not yet grasped how they work.

*Knight of Cups* focuses on Rick (Christian Bale), a successful LA-based screenwriter drifting through life in search of meaning, sleeping with several women along the way – a description that suggests something considerably more linear than what actually appears on screen. Essentially, the entire narrative is outlined during the opening minutes, with details gradually being filled in as the film proceeds. Yet these details never quite come into focus, the status and function of certain characters (most of whom aren't even identified by name until the end credits) and events being merely hinted at. Is Rick involved with more than one woman simultaneously, or engaging in sequential relationships? Does a single shot of Rick's father Joseph (Brian Dennehy) walking across a stage in front of an applauding audience indicate that he's a professional actor, or is it a dream?

Far from imposing itself stylistically, *Knight of Cups*, like its author, seems determined to withdraw from view, permitting us to make whatever we wish of its various fragments. Yet shyness is not easily separable from egotism, modesty here existing alongside hints that matters of great import – the meaning of life, alienation from modern society, the existence of God – are being addressed. It is, of course,



Knight errant: Christian Bale

tempting to assume that Malick has some form of mysticism in mind (signified by the film's tarot references), his constantly drifting camera representing an all-seeing, all-knowing deity relentlessly following the protagonist, charting this pilgrim's progress towards a state of grace.

The problem with this reading is that the film steadfastly repudiates all attempts to pin it down, spinning in new directions before extractable ideas can take shape. The criticisms various female characters make of Rick's behaviour ("I think you're weak," insists Della/Imogen Poots) are clearly valid yet derive from moral stances that are themselves compromised (with the exception of charity doctor Nancy/Cate Blanchett, their behaviour patterns, career choices and attitudes towards sexual fidelity are not neatly distinguishable from Rick's) and susceptible to critique.

Beyond – or perhaps complexly interconnected with – all this, *Knight of Cups* is, at the simplest level, a visually stunning achievement. It consistently asks us to relish not just nature's glory but also the minutiae of quotidian life: an umbrella being opened, a dog swimming,

a child crawling across the floor. Conservative and radical viewpoints are, however, in a state of constant war: the hints at a Christian fundamentalist theme introduced via Father Zeitlinger (Armin Mueller-Stahl) are contradicted by the secular humanism of Della, Nancy, Helen (Freida Pinto) and Elizabeth (Natalie Portman). The delicate precision of this approach rather oddly aligns Malick's film with a tradition of Hollywood classicism whose complexity results from a tension between the director and the ideological tendencies of the material (John Ford, with his ambiguous and contradictory view of the cavalry, for example). Which suggests that, if *Knight* can be linked with any other recent film, it is Clint Eastwood's *American Sniper* (2014).

But it would make more sense to group *Knight of Cups* with other 21st-century masterpieces such as Philippe Grandrieux's *La Vie nouvelle*, David Lynch's *Inland Empire*, Monte Hellman's *Road to Nowhere*, Tsai Ming-liang's *Stray Dogs* and Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *The Assassin* (2015), in all of which the narrative exists mostly by implication but the emotions are crystal clear. It seems that something very exciting is happening in world cinema. **S**

## Credits and Synopsis

### Produced by

Nicolas Gonda  
Sarah Green  
Ken Kao

### Written by

Terrence Malick

### Director of

Photography

Emmanuel Lubezki

### Edited by

Geoffrey Richman  
Keith Fraase

A.J. Edwards

### Production Designer

Jack Fisk

### Original Music

Hanan Townshend

### Sound Designer

Joel Dougherty

### Costume Designer

Jacqueline West

©Dogwood

Pictures, LLC

Production

Companies

Broad Green

Pictures presents

in association

with Waypoint

Entertainment

### Executive Producers

Glen Basner

Tanner Beard

### Cast

Christian Bale

Barry

Rick

### Cate Blanchett

Nancy

Natalie Portman

Elizabeth

Brian Dennehy

Joseph

Antonio Banderas

Tonio

Freida Pinto

Helen

Wes Bentley

Barry

Isabel Lucas

Isabel

Teresa Palmer

Karen

Imogen Poots

Della

Peter Matthiessen

Christopher

Armin Mueller-Stahl

Father Zeitlinger

Cherry Jones

Ruth

Dolby Digital

### In Colour

[2.35:1]

### Distributor

Studiocanal Limited

Los Angeles, present day. Rick, a sexually promiscuous Hollywood screenwriter, is visited by his brother Barry. The apparent suicide of a third brother, Billy, has created a conflict between the surviving siblings and their father, Joseph. Rick becomes briefly involved with the free-spirited Della, and is visited by his ex-wife Nancy, a doctor who treats charity patients. She asks if he regrets not having had children. At a party, he meets Helen, a model

with whom he subsequently becomes involved. While visiting a strip club, he encounters Australian pole dancer Karen and takes her to Las Vegas. He has a passionate affair with the married Elizabeth. She becomes pregnant and, unsure whether Rick or her husband is the father, has an abortion.

Rick is last seen with the mysterious Isabel, who accompanies him into the desert, where he appears to find peace.



## Love & Friendship

Ireland/France/The Netherlands/USA/United Kingdom 2016  
Director: Whit Stillman  
Certificate U 93m 26s

See Feature  
on page 16

### Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

"You mean she's dumped Ted and gone back to Ramone because of some conversation?" asks an irritable Fred of Marta, his date, in Whit Stillman's

*Barcelona* (1994). The naval officer's appalled tone, his looking aghast, makes us laugh, because *Barcelona* is all conversation; one followed by another, followed by another, like a row of ants. It's not by chance that one of the nightclubs frequented by Fred and Marta is called 'Vis-à-Vis'.

As in *Barcelona*, so in Stillman's other films: talking – in rooms, in bars, inside cars, on the dance floor – precipitates incident; dialogue has consequences. Among other qualities, it's this that makes Stillman so eligible a proxy for Jane Austen. *Love & Friendship*, his fifth film, adapts Austen's *Lady Susan* – a lesser-known epistolary novella – converting many of the letters that pass between the title character and her confidante Alicia into tête-à-têtes. Stillman returns periodically to these frank exchanges (conducted in secret – Alicia is forbidden by her husband to meet with the dissolute widow), imparting structure to a film that is otherwise as peripatetic as its heroine, who has nowhere to hang her ostentatious, ostrich-feathered hats. As she reminds her teenaged daughter, "We don't live, we visit."

The film's focus is Lady Susan's scheming, the precise aims of which are withheld from the viewer, albeit we know what she covets: a steady flow of money and a man to slake her lust. Stillman fills his film with holes; doors close on consequential conversations, leaving the viewer shifting from foot to foot in the hall. Lady Susan's subjective filling in the blanks for her best friend introduces an element of tension that keeps us interested to the end: does she exaggerate her upper hand; will she be undone?

Stillman is experienced at putting unpleasant characters to the fore of his films. It takes the full running time of *Love & Friendship* to discover just how cunning and self-centred its protagonist is; less time to be certain how intelligent. This is made apparent early on, when Lady Susan arrives – with an impoverished companion she has made her unpaid domestic – at Churchill, home of her late husband's brother, and is introduced to Reginald, who is staying there. He is amused by the rumours of her improprieties. So confident is he that he has the measure of his sister's husband's brother's widow that he greets her with a sardonic "your renown precedes you". But if he assumed – as we, too, might have – that her charms were purely carnal, he was wrong. With the suddenness of a viper striking at its prey, she defuses his superciliousness, so that neither he nor we will underestimate her again. Undoubtedly, Lady Susan is beautiful, but it's social intelligence that enables her to control others with staggering success. As such, she is very like Jane Austen, if Austen had bent her gift of perception to evil-doing.

Besides this, a large part of Lady Susan's personality is an almost pathological inability to admit wrongdoing, and a great deal of the film's comedy arises from the mental acrobatics she is wont to perform in order to assert her rectitude. Kate Beckinsale is effectively straight-faced



Frocking the boat: Chloë Sevigny, Kate Beckinsale

in the role – menacing, narcissistic, enjoyably unlikeable – but doesn't bend over backwards. Much of what works about her performance is inherent: the actress's girlish, airy voice, for example, amplifies the deceptive innocence of her exterior. Furthermore, her director does her the service of having all intimacies and many of her most pivotal workings-over take place off screen. This nourishes her mystery, so that Lady Susan rears over the film, a monster of mythical size.

Tom Bennett, by contrast, as the idiot-suitor of Lady Susan's daughter, quadruples the intended humour of his lines by his delivery, and Stillman gives him reams of time to do it in. The wooden bonhomie of Sir James – Bennett

gives him only two attitudes, hand on hip and pointing a finger, as if Sir James has studied, in a book, the body language befitting a respectable gentleman – is as inventive and hilarious a physical performance as any I've seen on screen.

Stillman doesn't have as much fun with the camera as one could wish. (One misses the silly POVs of *Barcelona*.) Combined with the structural principle of looping back to Alicia and the deadpan sameness of the dialogue, the lack of compositional variation makes it possible to tire of the film's concept two-thirds of the way through. Otherwise, *Love & Friendship* is highly entertaining, with Austen's text fitting Stillman's style like a Regency-era glove. ☺

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Katie Holly  
Lauranne Bourrachot  
Whit Stillman  
**Written by**  
Whit Stillman  
**Dramaturge**  
Trevor Brown  
Based on Jane Austen's novella  
*Lady Susan*  
**Cinematography**  
Richard van Oosterhout  
**Edited by**  
Sophie Cora  
**Production Design**  
Anna Rackard  
**Composer**  
Benjamin Esdraffo  
**Sound**  
Jean-Luc Audy  
**Costumes**  
Eimer Ni Mhaoldomhnaigh

©Blinder Films,  
Chic Films, Revolver  
Amsterdam, ARTE  
France Cinéma  
**Production Companies**  
A Westerly Films,  
Blinder Films, Chic  
Films production  
in co-production  
with Revolver  
Amsterdam & ARTE  
France Cinéma  
In association

with Protagonist  
Pictures, Soficinéma  
11, Cinéma 10 &  
the Netherlands  
Film Fund  
With the participation  
of Bord Scannán  
na hÉireann/The  
Irish Film Board  
& ARTE France  
With the support of  
Centre national de la  
cinématographie et  
de l'image animée  
Supported by  
the Netherlands  
Film Fund and the  
Netherlands Film  
Production Incentive  
**Executive Producers**  
Russell Pennoyer  
Collin de Rham  
Kieron J. Walsh  
Nigel Williams

**Cast**  
**Kate Beckinsale**  
Lady Susan  
Vernon Martin  
**Xavier Samuel**  
Reginald Decourcy  
**Morfydd Clark**  
Frederica Vernon  
**Emma Greenwell**  
Catherine Decourcy  
Vernon  
**Tom Bennett**  
Sir James Martin  
**James Fleet**

Sir Reginald Decourcy  
**Jemma Redgrave**  
Lady Decourcy  
**Justin Edwards**  
Charles Vernon  
**Stephen Fry**  
Mr Johnson  
**Chloë Sevigny**  
Alicia Johnson  
(an American)  
**Jenn Murray**  
Lady Lucy Manwaring

**In Colour**  
**Distributor**  
Curzon Film World

London, the 1790s. Widowed temptress Lady Susan, rumoured to have dallied with the married Lord Manwaring, journeys to Churchill, the home of her late husband's brother Charles Vernon. There, Lady Susan impresses on Charles's brother-in-law – the young, handsome Reginald DeCourcy – the unfoundedness of her notoriety. Reginald's sister Catherine, Charles's wife, fears that Lady Susan will entrap her bachelor brother. (At intervals, Lady Susan divulges the hoped-for outcomes of her manoeuvrings to her friend Alicia Johnson.) When Lady Susan's daughter Frederica runs away from school, Charles brings her to Churchill, which vexes Lady Susan. She arranges for Frederica's foolish yet affluent suitor Sir James Martin to visit Churchill. Frederica confides in Reginald that she wishes not to marry Sir James, causing a row between Reginald and her mother. Lady Susan soon mends the spat with flattery. Lady Susan and Reginald rendezvous in London, where Reginald presses her to commit to their (off-screen) agreement to be married. She delays. A hysterical Lady Manwaring calls on her patron Mr Johnson. Moments afterwards, Reginald calls at the Johnsons with a letter from Lady Susan for Alicia and learns that Lady Susan and Lord Manwaring have met clandestinely that same day. Lady Susan denies wrongdoing and calls off her engagement to Reginald, citing mistrust. At Churchill, romance blossoms between Frederica and Reginald. Lady Susan marries Sir James. The latter is oblivious to her ongoing affair with Lord Manwaring, whose own marriage has broken down and who now lives with the newlyweds. Sir James is unperturbed to learn on the morning after their wedding that his wife is pregnant. Reginald and Frederica are wed.



# Mustang

France/Germany/Turkey/Qatar 2015  
 Director: Deniz Gamze Ergüven  
 Certificate 15 97m 5s

See Feature  
 on page 28

## Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The Turkish-French director Deniz Gamze Ergüven's *Mustang* has a structure that's a little bit like a prison-break movie and a little bit like a

body-count thriller: a stalker slowly winnows down a group of vulnerable women, until there are none. In this case we are dealing with five sisters who, when their running free around their conservative village begins to set tongues wagging, are effectively sealed into their family home and, one by one, primed by their guardians for marriage. The equivalent of the stalking killer here isn't one unbalanced individual but rather the demands of a small-minded community, and the scene of the crime is the marriage bed, complete with splash of blood as proof of virginity – and heaven forbid it should be absent. (The film details at some length the process whereby doctors are routinely employed to provide official testimony to the presence of the maidenhead.)

The sisters range in age from pre-teen gangliness to late adolescence, and the two who initially distinguish themselves as distinct characters are the eldest, Sonay (Ilayda Akdogan), who sneaks out for assignations with a chosen lover and freely discusses their strategy for making love without disturbing the hymen, and the youngest, Lale (Günes Nezihe Sensoy), whose impulsive nature is on display from the start. But in the early scenes the sisters are presented almost as a single unit, lolling about together in a tangle of lank, bare limbs, recalling Adrian Lyne's *Foxes* (1980), or huddled together in a gesture of threatened solidarity, like a football team before a match, photographed by Ergüven from within.

These images of sisterly community are *Mustang*'s most memorable moments, but taken altogether they aren't a sturdy enough base on which to build the film's ambitions towards tragic weight. If good intentions were the lone criterion for grading films – and with every week bringing an Important Issue to be unpacked, it increasingly seems that they are – then Ergüven's feature debut would be worthy of the glowing reviews it received at last year's Cannes festival. Its narrative confirms in no uncertain terms what its inscribed audience believes to be true: that a shadowy climate of religious fundamentalism fosters suspicion and body shame and forces secrecy, and this is not a healthy environment in which to raise young women who desire nothing more than light, open air and freedom.

*Mustang*, with its one-dimensional figures of conservative authority, is too narrowly Manichean to allow the troubling ambivalence of multiple perspectives, but at the same time it manages to seem curiously tentative. Part of the problem is that Ergüven pictures liberty more vividly than she does captivity; there is no choking claustrophobia to lend the film an edge of genuine, cornered-animal desperation. Much of the film is seen from the perspective of youngest sister Lale, and her voiceover, coming to us from a safe space at an undisclosed point in the faraway future, acts as a soothing guarantor that all of this will pass. The sense of slow smothering is expressed in only the most literal-minded visual terms – workmen building household



Freedom song: Ilayda Akdogan

fortifications – and there is none of the feeling of mounting cabin fever that might lend terrible immediacy to the offscreen suicide of one of the sisters, precipitated by sexual abuse within the protective walls of home. This plot turn occurs abruptly, and the brusqueness with which the pall of mourning is blown away once she's played

her role as sacrifice to narrative exigencies betrays the earlier establishment of sisterly solidarity. Lacking either breadth of social vision or a constricting focus that might really discomfit an audience, *Mustang* steers the comfortable middle road that often garners acclaim but never touches the queasy, perilous heights of art.

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
 Charles Gillibert  
**Written by**  
 Deniz Gamze Ergüven  
 Alice Winocour  
**Directors of Photography**  
 David Chizallet  
 Ersin Gök  
**Editor**  
 Mathilde Van de Moortel  
**Art Director**  
 Serdar Yemisci  
**Music**  
 Warren Ellis  
**Sound Recordist**

**Costume Designer**  
 Selin Sözen  
**CG Cinéma, Vistmar**  
 Filmproduktion,  
 Uhländfilm, Bam Film, Kinology  
**Production Companies**  
 CG Cinéma presents  
 in co-production  
 with Vistmar  
 Filmproduktion,  
 Uhländfilm, Bam Film  
 In association  
 with Kinology

With the participation  
 of Canal+, Ciné+,  
 ZDF/ARTE, Doha Film  
 Institute, Aide aux  
 Cinémas du monde,  
 Centre National du  
 Cinéma et de l'image  
 animée, Ministère des  
 affaires étrangères,  
 Institut Français  
 With the support  
 of Eurimages, The  
 Turkish Ministry  
 of Culture, Centre  
 National du Cinéma  
 et de l'image animée,  
 Filmförderungsanstalt

FFA/The  
 German-French  
 Commission, Film und  
 Medienstiftung NRW  
 A CG Cinéma, Vistmar  
 Filmproduktion,  
 Uhländfilm, Bam Film,  
 Kinology  
 co-production  
 Recipient of a post-  
 production grant from  
 Doha Film Institute

**Cast**  
 Günes Nezihe  
 Sensoy

Lale  
 Doga Zeynep  
 Doguslu  
 Nur  
 Tugba Sunguroglu  
 Selma  
 Elit Iscan  
 Ece  
 Ilayda Akdogan  
 Sonay  
 Nihal Koldas  
 grandmother  
 Ayberk Pekcan  
 Erol  
 Bahar Kerimoglu  
 Dilek  
 Burak Yigit

Yasin  
 Suzanne Marrot  
 Aunt Hanife  
 Erol Afsin  
 Osman

**In Colour**  
 [2.35:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
 Curzon Film World

Rural Turkey, present day. On the last day of term, a class of teenage schoolboys and schoolgirls bid goodbye to their beloved teacher Yasin, who is moving to Istanbul, and go to the beach. Among the group are sisters Sonay, Selma, Ece, Nur and Lale. When they return home, the sisters are violently chastised by their guardians – their grandmother and their uncle Erol – because word of their brazen play with the boys on the beach has scandalised the village. The family home is fortified to make it more difficult for them to sneak in and out, and the girls are told that they must marry, beginning with the two eldest, Sonay and Selma. Before the

matchmaking commences, the girls have one last taste of freedom, slipping out of the house to travel to a football match. Wilful Sonay manages her pick of mate, but Selma is not so lucky, and her boorish new husband's family question her virginity when she fails to bleed on her wedding night. Ece's marriage is arranged next, but she begins to behave erratically and abruptly commits suicide. When Nur is readied for marriage, the headstrong Lale devises a plan to escape to Istanbul. On the night of Nur's intended wedding, the girls escape with the help of the truck driver who took them to the football match. They arrive in Istanbul, where they are welcomed by Yasin.



## My Big Fat Greek Wedding 2

USA/United Kingdom 2016  
Director: Kirk Jones  
Certificate 12A 93m 55s

### Reviewed by Leigh Singer

That 2002's indie sleeper hit *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* remains the highest-grossing romantic comedy of all time is testament not only to writer-star Nia Vardalos's winning underdog story and the film's gentle charms but also to the dolorous state of the modern romcom, a long-maligned genre in desperate need of renewal. Such salvation isn't forthcoming from this belated sequel, however. A second helping of comfort food seemingly designed for maximum familiarity and blandness, it makes slick family-based dramedies such as *This Is 40* (2012) look as gritty as the domestic blitzes of that other Greek-American, John Cassavetes, whose cinema effectively speaks an entirely different language.

The follow-up film brings back the entire cast and numerous gags from the original. The one surprise is that, thankfully, the new matrimonial quandary doesn't involve Paris, the 17-year-old daughter of Vardalos's character Toula. Instead, it's Toula's parents Gus and Maria who, discovering that they were never officially hitched, must now decide, decades on, whether or not to reaffirm their vows. If this is a credibility-straining contrivance, Vardalos at least uses it to explore long-term relationships in which (over-)familiarity and duty have gradually replaced romance and passion. This is the case not only for Gus and Maria but also for Toula and her husband Ian. As wisecracking Aunt Voula advises Toula, "You were a girlfriend before you were a mother." At the same time, Toula's fear of Paris leaving the nest to go to university ostensibly provides a counterbalancing generational storyline.

That's the theory. In practice, however, *MBFGW2* is almost pathological in its efforts to minimise each and every potential conflict. Tensions between Gus and Maria or Toula and Ian are massaged away with the slightest touch. Subplots such as Gus's long-running feud with his Greece-based brother or acceptance of his cousin Angelo's homosexuality barely take a



Greekfest: Nia Vardalos, John Corbett

scene to resolve themselves. It's as if Vardalos is so enamoured with reassembling her cast that she can't bear for them to have even fake arguments on screen. One would never guess that Greece has been a country in turmoil, its financial and political future at the forefront of international debate; or that immigrant communities, particularly those claiming to be as insular as this film's Portokalos clan, are such a hot-button topic in the current US election campaign. An early voiceover suggests that Toula's family don't know the difference between hugging and suffocation: a point the film then inadvertently confirms by smothering its own drama. The offensively inoffensive staging and pacing from director Kirk Jones do nothing to help.

It's a shame. The first film showed that, despite playing caricatures, the lively cast – particularly veterans Michael Constantine, Lainie Kazan and Andrea Martin – would be well up to more challenging material. One never doubts Vardalos's sincerity or heart, but she's so preoccupied with providing reassuring soap operatics that anything even vaguely threatening to exasperated familial acceptance is firmly shut out. For all Gus's big fat boasting of descent from the world-conquering Alexander the Great, the film flatly refuses to step outside the family's adjacent front doors. Ⓜ

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Rita Wilson  
Gary Goetzman  
Tom Hanks

#### Written by

Nia Vardalos

#### Director of

Photography

#### Editor

Mark Czerwinski

#### Production Designer

Gregory Keen

#### Music

Christopher Lennertz

#### Production

#### Sound Mixer

Glen Gauthier

#### Costume Designer

Gersha Phillips

#### ©Home Box Office,

Inc. and Big Fat

Holdings LLC

#### Production

Companies

Universal Pictures

and Gold Circle

Entertainment

present in association

with Home Box Office

a Playtone picture

#### Produced with

the assistance of

Quickfire Films

#### Executive Producers

Paul Brooks

Scott Niemeyer

Steven Shreshian

Nia Vardalos

#### Cast

Nia Vardalos

Toula

John Corbett

Ian

Michael Constantine

Gus Portokalos

Lainie Kazan

Maria

Andrea Martin

Aunt Voula

Gia Carides

Nikki

Joey Fatone

Angelo

Elena Kampouris

Paris

Alex Wolff

Bennett

Louis Mandylor

Nick

Bess Meisler

Mana-Yiaya

Bruce Gray

Rodney

Fiona Reid

Harriet

Ian Gomez

Mike

Jayne Eastwood

Mrs White

Rob Riggie

Northwestern rep

Mark Margolis

Panos

Rita Wilson

Anna

John Stamos

George

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

Universal Pictures

International

UK & Eire

Chicago, present day. More than a decade on from Toula Portokalos's wedding to Ian, their teenage daughter Paris is torn between choosing a college close to home or moving to New York, away from her overly involved and frequently embarrassing parents, grandparents Gus and Maria and extended family. Toula continues to work in her parents' Greek restaurant. Her relationship with Ian is in a rut. Following her aunt Voula's advice, she tries to reignite the passion in their marriage, though attempted romance in their parked car is interrupted by the family. Gus's efforts to prove that he is a direct descendant of Alexander

the Great result in him discovering that he and Maria were never legally wed before they emigrated to the US. The couple decide to marry officially, though Maria starts to have second thoughts. When the wedding planner quits because of Maria's demanding behaviour, the family decide to organise the event themselves. Paris opts for Chicago's Northwestern University; she asks her school crush Bennett to the prom. Maria and Gus marry. Bennett reveals to Paris that he also comes from a Greek family. Paris tells her family that she really wants to go to college in New York – which she does, with her family's blessing.

## Our Kind of Traitor

Director: Susanna White  
Certificate 15 107m 36s

### Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

John le Carré's 2010 novel *Our Kind of Traitor*, like much of the author's post-Cold War output, posits dirty money as the new spy. Like George Smiley or Alec Leamas, it moves around the globe, its true purpose concealed and obfuscated by those pulling the strings. Six years on, the novel's focus on the international black economy and the institutions, banks and governments tethered to it scarcely feels less topical – at the time of writing this review, the Mossack Fonseca 'Panama Papers' scandal was still unfolding. As in le Carré's *The Night Manager* (arms dealing) and *The Constant Gardener* (big pharma), a Briton is drawn into the workings of an amoral, many-tentacled system. In Hossein Amini's effectively streamlined adaptation, this is mild-mannered poetics lecturer Perry (Ewan McGregor), whose chance meeting with a disgruntled Russian money launderer in desperate need of defection to the west (Stellan Skarsgård) kicks the plot into motion.

Perry is holidaying in Marrakech with barrister girlfriend Gail (Naomie Harris) when he fatefully accepts a drink from Skarsgård's gregarious Dima, a mob oligarch with an especial fondness for tennis. After whisking the frazzled Perry away to a couple of hedonistic parties and lavish soirées, Dima abruptly confides in his guest that his family's life is in danger – his opposition to the underworld's increased collaboration with the Kremlin has made him a marked man. Perry – to Gail's acute chagrin – reluctantly agrees to relay to MI6 information that Dima hopes to use as leverage to obtain British protection.

If Perry is a typical latter-day le Carré protagonist, then his erstwhile intelligence contact Hector Meredith is a more familiar old-school type. Sporting some distinctly Smiley-esque specs, Damian Lewis is a natural fit for this quizzical operative, driven by a personal vendetta against a high-ranking MP who may be implicated in Dima's leaks. Meredith's view of his quarry is starkly Manichean – he quotes Polish philosopher Leszek Kołakowski when telling Perry that evil in men needs no nurturing, it just exists. It's a stance the film tends to countenance – assorted villains aren't given much depth. However, it astutely conveys how easily led into complicity the characters can be. Perry, whose past infidelity with a student has estranged him from Gail, has his actions dictated by a crucial lack of self-resolve; he later berates Gail for her hypocrisy in defending criminals such as Dima every day for her profession. And



Carré on spying: Ewan McGregor, Naomie Harris



Skarsgård, tattooed from head to toe and burly, is terrific as the coarse oligarch whose genial exterior masks a ruthless core.

As with his prior adaptations of Henry James, Thomas Hardy and Patricia Highsmith, Amini skilfully condenses and simplifies the expansive source material without neutering its indignant, despairing political thrust. Director Susanna White, whose versatile background in television ranges from BBC's *Bleak House* to David Simon's HBO Iraq drama *Generation Kill*, maintains a brisk pace – in notable contrast to the deliberate, understated tenor of le Carré interpretations by Tomas Alfredson (*Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, 2011) and Anton Corbijn (*A Most Wanted Man*, 2014). Often suggesting a more cerebral *Bourne* movie, the urgent momentum and sensuous photography (by Anthony Dod Mantle) perhaps most closely echo Fernando Meirelles's 2005 film of *The Constant Gardener*. Involving and timely, despite its suspense mechanics tending towards the conventional, it's a respectable addition to a fine recent run of le Carré adaptations. **B**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Gail Egan Stephen Cornwell Simon Cornwell	Studiocanal and Film4 present in association with Anton Capital Entertainment S.C.A. and Amazon Prime Instant Video an Ink Factory production in association with Potboiler Productions A film by Susanna White	Dima <b>Damian Lewis</b> Hector Meredith Naomie Harris Gail
<b>Written by</b> Hossein Amini Based on the novel by John le Carré	<b>Director of Photography</b> Anthony Dod Mantle	<b>Jeremy Northam</b> Aubrey Longrigg Khalid Abdalla Luke
<b>Editors</b> Tariq Anwar Lucia Zucchetti	<b>Executive Producers</b> John le Carré Tessa Ross	<b>Mark Gatiss</b> Billy Matlock <b>Saskia Reeves</b> Tamara
<b>Production Designer</b> Sarah Greenwood	<b>Music</b> Marcelo Zarvos	<b>Alicia von Rittberg</b> Natasha
<b>Production Sound Mixer</b> Gareth John	<b>Costume Designer</b> Julian Day	<b>Mark Stanley</b> Ollie
	<b>Cast</b> Ewan McGregor Perry Stellan Skarsgård	<b>Grigoriy Dobrygin</b> 'The Prince'
<b>Production Companies</b>		<b>In Colour</b> [2.35:1]
		<b>Distributor</b> Studiocanal Limited

Marrakech, present day. Holidaying with his wife Gail, lecturer Perry befriends Dima, a Russian oligarch who launders money for the mob. Dima confides in Perry that his opposition to new mob boss Nicolas 'the Prince' Petrov has put his family's life in danger. Perry agrees to pass on Dima's information about Petrov's dealings to British intelligence, which Dima hopes will earn him protection in return. MI6 operative Hector Meredith notices that Dima's files – which concern a bank being set up in London using laundered money – list MP Aubrey Longrigg as a potential beneficiary. Dima requests that Perry and Gail be present with Hector at a Paris rendezvous. Petrov's henchmen grow suspicious of Perry and Gail's relationship with Dima. In Bern, Dima signs off the bank's accounts to Petrov, planning to give Hector the numbers afterwards. Dima kills a henchman sent after him by Petrov. Dima is moved to a safe house in the Alps, along with his family, Perry and Gail. During a foiled attack by Petrov's men, Perry saves Dima's life. Dima agrees to be flown to the UK alone so that his information can be verified, but the helicopter explodes in mid-air. In London, Perry visits Hector, giving him an antique gun owned by Dima. Hector finds the account numbers inside the gun, proving Longrigg's complicity.

## Race

Canada/Germany/France 2016  
Director: Stephen Hopkins

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

Arguments persist as to whether Hitler shook Jesse Owens's hand at the 1936 Olympics, but this print-the-legend biopic has the Nazi chancellor avoid the inconveniently black winner – showing this significant snub as just another instance of the prejudice Owens was used to. Berlin tidies persecutions out of sight so as not to affront visitors (in contemporary Olympics, homeless or otherwise 'unsuitable' people are still quietly removed from games sites) but in America a doorman at the Waldorf Astoria unapologetically asks Owens and his wife to use the side entrance, even when attending a reception in his honour.

*Race* tells two different stories with the same climax: the gold medals won by African-American Owens. The dominant thread is an against-the-odds sports story covering Owens's track and field career and relationship with his (white) coach Larry Snyder. Stephan James, who played civil rights leader John Lewis in *Selma* (2014), works hard on Owens's running style – training with limbo-dance poles to encourage him to start low, high-stepping to swing records to develop a powerful stride – but is slightly stuck with the near-vestigial personal life (seething out-of-work dad, doting and determined mom, long-suffering girlfriend/baby mama, flashy on-the-road fling). A rivalry with another black runner, whose career is ended by injury, is promising but undeveloped. When not running or jumping, the quiet, interior Jesse has to sit and listen – mostly to constantly tripping Snyder, who is played loosely by Jason Sudeikis as if channelling mid-period Dennis Quaid. As is traditional in sports movies, the coach has an inspiring anecdote for every occasion.

Meanwhile, in starrily cast cutaways, the film sketches in the backroom deals and arguments about the staging of the highly politicised Berlin Olympics. In America, dignitaries Jeremiah Mahoney (William Hurt) and Avery Brundage (Jeremy Irons) take different sides on the issue of

whether America should even attend the games, which is represented as a simple contest between racially diverse US (though two Jewish runners are forced off the relay team to appease the Nazi hosts) and all-Aryan Germany. Josef Goebbels is probably one of the few historical figures it's impossible to play as anything but a supervillain, and Barnaby Metschurat contributes a cold-eyed, steely study in pint-sized evil while ambiguously bribing construction millionaire Brundage with the contract to build a new German embassy in Washington or blankly watching the rushes of *Olympia* while minions struggle to detect twitches of approval or disapproval.

For contrast, *Race* finds good Germans in jumper Carl 'Luz' Long (David Kross), who blots his copybook by displaying good sportsmanship, and Leni Riefenstahl, whose many complexities are conveyed by Carice van Houten as if bidding for her own biographical vehicle. If the film holds back on assessing Riefenstahl's complicity in Nazism, it doesn't mention either that Owens was a lifelong Republican who campaigned against Roosevelt. Late in life, he argued against the US decision to boycott the 1980 Moscow Olympics after the invasion of Afghanistan.

Stephen Hopkins, who has moved from sci-fi action movies (*Predator 2*, *Lost in Space*) to more varied if inconsistent fare (including high-end TV shows such as *House of Lies*), previously went the biopic route in *The Life and Death of Peter Sellers* (2004). Here, he has to work hard to make the highlights of Owens's career the highlights of the film, since the athlete's track events were all over inside a minute. Playing some stadium scenes from Owens's overwhelmed POV works well, with Hitler a tiny figure in the distance, or the Hindenburg passing overhead. Only the long jump, which is more complex and features a personal competition with Long, has any dramatic build-up (heats, multiple jumps, records broken, disqualified attempts) before the medal-and-laurels payoff. **B**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Jean-Charles Lévy Luc Dayan Louis-Philippe Rochon Dominique Séguin Stephen Hopkins Kate Garwood Nicolas Manuel Karsten Brünig	<b>Sound Mixer</b> Claude La Haye <b>Costume Designer</b> Mario Davignon	of a Solofilms/ Trinica/Trinity Race production A Stephen Hopkins Film Supported by funding from Deutscher Filmförderfonds Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg <b>Executive Producers</b> Jonathan Bronfman David Garrett Scott Kennedy Thierry Potok Al Munteanu Mark Slone	<b>Cast</b> <b>Stephan James</b> James Cleveland Owens, 'Jesse' <b>Jason Sudeikis</b> Larry Snyder <b>Jeremy Irons</b> Avery Brundage <b>Carice van Houten</b> Leni Riefenstahl <b>Eli Goree</b> Dave Albritton <b>Tony Curran</b> Lawson Robertson <b>Shanice Banton</b> Ruth Solomon <b>Amanda Crew</b> Peggy <b>David Kross</b> Carl Long, 'Luz'	<b>Barnaby Metschurat</b> Josef Goebbels <b>Jonathan Aris</b> Alfred J. Lill <b>Tim McInnerny</b> Charles Sherrill <b>Nicholas Woodeson</b> Fred Rubien <b>Jesse Bostick</b> Ken Seitz <b>Glynn Turman</b> Harry E. Davis <b>William Hurt</b> Jeremiah Mahoney	Altitude Film Distribution  Canadian French theatrical title 10 secondes de liberté
<b>Written by</b> Joe Shrapnel Anna Waterhouse <b>Director of Photography</b> Peter Levy <b>Edited by</b> John Smith <b>Production Designer</b> David Brisbin <b>Music</b>	<b>©Jesse Race</b> Productions Quebec Inc./Trinity Race GmbH <b>Production Companies</b> A Forecast Pictures and ID+ presentation in association with Jobro Film Finance Ltd., The Jesse Owens Foundation and The Luminary Group		<b>Dolby Digital</b> In Colour [2.35:1] <b>Distributor</b>		

Ohio State University, 1933. James Cleveland ('Jesse') Owens, a talented black athlete, trains for field and track events under coach Larry Snyder. His growing success – and an away-from-home fling – puts a strain on his relationship with Ruth Solomon, mother of his daughter, but the couple marry. Avery Brundage of the American Olympic Committee argues that the national team should not boycott the 1936 games

held in Berlin, and wins a vote by a narrow margin. Jesse competes in the Olympics and wins four gold medals (100m, 200m, long jump and as a member of the 400m relay team), undermining propaganda minister Josef Goebbels's plan to use the sporting event to champion Aryan supremacy. Despite pressure from Goebbels, filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl features Jesse in her documentary 'Olympia'.



## Robinson Crusoe

Belgium/France/United Kingdom/USA 2015  
Director: Vincent Kesteloot  
Certificate PG 90m 17s

### Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

The children's cartoon *Robinson Crusoe* – and it's very much aimed at children, with none of the surprise adult appeal of Disney's *Zootropolis* – is the new offering from Belgium's nWave studio. While nWave may never get name recognition, parents with young children have likely seen some of its cartoon wares, such as the lame *Fly Me to the Moon* (2008) and the better *The House of Magic* (2013). Both involved nWave's founder, Ben Stassen, who co-directs *Robinson Crusoe* with Vincent Kesteloot.

The story is what one might expect of a cartoon of Daniel Defoe's novel. It takes the story of a man shipwrecked on a remote island and invents a cast of cute talking birds and animals to react to him, initially fearfully, before they're domesticated. (Later it's suggested that taming wild animals may not be a good thing, but that's soon forgotten.) Man Friday is replaced by a precocious parrot named Tuesday; the main villains are a pair – and later a clan – of vicious cats; and the human Crusoe is entirely colourless.

Technically, *Robinson Crusoe* shows that nWave is still improving. It's an impressively good-looking film, with detailed, immersive environments that have very convincing depth (the preview screening was through 3D glasses). The characters and story, though, are rudimentary for anyone over about eight, and there are a couple of possible issues for younger children: one dog character is killed off midway through the story, and later the animals experiment dangerously with Crusoe's loaded gun. However, *Robinson Crusoe* is still an infinitely finer kids' cartoon than the recent, wretched *Norm of the North*. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Ben Stassen  
Caroline Van Iseghem  
Dominic Paris  
Gina Gallo  
Mimi Maynard  
**Screenplay**  
Lee Christopher  
Dominic Paris  
Graham Welldon  
**Director of Photography**  
Barbara Meyers  
**Art Direction**  
Anthony Leveque  
Vincent Kesteloot  
**Music Composed by/Score**  
Produced by  
Ramin Djawadi  
**Sound Design**  
Yves Renard  
Pierre 'Lele' Lebecque  
**Animation Supervisor**  
Dirk De Loose

StudioCanal presents in association with Anton Capital Entertainment, S.C.A. an nWave Pictures production  
Supported by the Flanders Audiovisual Fund  
In association with Umedia  
Illuminata Pictures  
**Executive Producers**  
Olivier Courson  
Eric Dillens

### Voice Cast

**Doug Stone**  
Aynsley  
**Colin Metzger**  
Carmello  
**Michael Sorich**  
Cecil  
**Yuri Lowenthal**  
Robinson Crusoe  
**Sandy Fox**  
Epi  
**Jay Jones**  
Friday

**Lindsay Torrance**  
Kiki  
**Dennis O'Connor**  
Long John Silver  
**Joey Camen**  
Scrubby  
**Jeff Doucette**  
Pango  
**Laila Berzins**  
Rosie  
**David Howard**  
Mak, 'Tuesday'

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

**Distributor**  
Studiocanal Limited

©Movi3D Srl  
**Production Companies**

A remote tropical island, the 18th-century. Explorer Robinson Crusoe has been shipwrecked. The island's animals fear him at first, but then become his friends. However, they are menaced by a pair of malevolent cats that have been shipwrecked as well. Finally, Crusoe and his friends defeat the cats, though Crusoe is still on the island at the end.

## The Seventh Fire

USA/France 2015  
Director: Jack Pettibone Riccobono  
Certificate 15 75m 25s

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

"Terrence Malick Presents", the words above the title, undeniably add a certain cachet to this documentary about life on an Indian reservation. That Malick is on board as one of various executive producers (others include Natalie Portman and the Native American filmmaker Chris Eyre) suggests something a little out of the ordinary, though this debut feature-length offering from director Jack Pettibone Riccobono takes its time to settle.

An opening montage collating images of life in Pine Point Village in Minnesota delineates a desolate place that looks more like an open prison, where furniture is left to burn by the roadside, little kids toddle around unchecked and boomboxes pound from passing vehicles filled with bored/out-of-it young folk. The sense of hopelessness is so heightened that it verges on the surreal, leaving one wondering if the film will be guilty of aestheticising hardship. With no voiceover or interviews to camera to feed us exposition, we're left instead to pick out the main players: Rob is the ne'er-do-well facing a jail term; Kevin the 17-year-old already in trouble with the law; while his father, a cleaned-up former alcoholic who now sources leeches for fishermen, has achieved a kind of serenity by giving up on the other two.

After a while, one can understand his point of view. Drugs and alcohol seem part of almost every waking moment for young and old alike, Kevin both partaking and distributing, since his income involves connecting local white teens with weed and crystal meth. Some of this coverage looks as if it was secretly shot on phones, but later it becomes no big deal for Rob and his pregnant girlfriend Christine to grab a few lines for breakfast while her kids and the camera crew look on. Those posters of *Scarface* aren't on the walls for nothing, and just as African-American gang culture has taken De Palma's film to its heart, these similarly marginalised Native Americans have seemingly co-opted the latter's hip-hop values, from the clothes and the music to the liberal use of the N-word as a term of affection. Here and there a few reminders of their own Native American heritage survive, but Riccobono, without labouring the

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Jack Pettibone  
Riccobono  
Shane Omar  
Slattery-Quintanilla  
Jihan Robinson  
Joey Carey  
**Written by**  
Jack Pettibone  
Riccobono  
Shane Omar  
Slattery-Quintanilla  
Andrew Ford

**Cinematography**  
Jack Pettibone  
Riccobono  
Shane Omar  
Slattery-Quintanilla  
**Edited by**  
Andrew Ford  
Adelaide Papazoglou  
Michael J. Palmer  
**Music by/Score and Songs Producer/Orchestrator**  
Nicholas Britell

**Sound Designer/Re-recording Mixer**  
Tom Paul  
  
©Seventh Fire, LLC  
**Production Companies**  
Terrence Malick presents an All Rites Reserved production in association with Sundial Pictures and Rich Hippie

**Productions**  
A film by Jack Pettibone Riccobono  
French delegate co-producer: Mareterranu Productions  
Made with the generous support of Catalyst Foundation, Independent Filmmaker Project, Virginia Wellington

Cabot Foundation, Creative Visions Foundation, Vassar College Research Committee, Yip Harburg Foundation, Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts  
**Executive Producers**  
Terrence Malick  
Natalie Portman  
Chris Eyre  
Sydney Holland

Erik Fleming  
Gavin Dougan  
Stefan Nowicki  
Lonnie Anderson  
  
**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]  
  
**Distributor**  
Metrodome  
Distribution Ltd

A documentary portrait of life in Pine Point Village in Minnesota's White Earth Reservation, focusing on Rob Brown, currently facing criminal charges and a potential jail term. Meanwhile, Rob's 17-year-old protégé Kevin makes a living as a drugs supplier to white schoolkids, much to the despair of his elderly father. Rob, who has substance issues himself, pleads guilty and faces 57 months in prison, thus missing the birth of his latest

child. Meanwhile Kevin attends a treatment centre for his crystal-meth problems, and becomes interested in a voluntary organisation helping young offenders by giving them a sense of their Native American heritage, though he later avoids the chance to make further contact. In prison, away from drugs, Rob sees clearly how he's become trapped in a spiral of addiction, but finds solace in writing poems and working on a memoir.



Breathing space: *The Seventh Fire*

point, suggests that its erasure by America's dominant white mainstream culture is part of the underlying problem. At the same time he flags up the possibility that both Rob and Kevin could still, like the latter's thoughtful parent, take some sustenance from remembrance of their forefathers, should they opt to do so.

That this lucid analysis emerges, rather than fixed theorising or special pleading, is thanks to the kind of keen observation that underlines the obvious trust between filmmakers and participants, and the film gains in emotional potency the more we share Rob and Kevin's hopes, fears and occasionally truly terrible choices. Craggly handsome Rob and lithe teenager Kevin are both highly charismatic in front of the camera, and the filmmakers evidently play on that – while also adding poetic images of open skies, falling fluffy snow and a bright-white prison facility that's a clean-slate metaphor without even trying. We're left in no doubt that however much we're taken with the iconography of the Native American community, the people themselves are in truly dire straits. Indeed, Rob's rueful offscreen comment to the director that "Your movie will do well abroad, they love Indians over there" is a sharply pertinent observation from a voice that more than deserves a hearing. **S**



## Sing Street

Ireland/USA/United Kingdom 2015  
 Director: John Carney  
 Certificate 12A 105m 36s

See Feature  
 on page 12

### Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

Writer-director John Carney would no doubt be the first to point out the parallels between his latest feature and Alan Parker's *The Commitments* (1991). The two films share not only a premise and a setting – both are about a young Dubliner forming a band – but a cast member too, in Maria Doyle Kennedy, who made her screen debut as a 'Commitmentette'. Carney's new film is spotted with 'acknowledgements' to *The Commitments*, including a nod to its central protagonist Jimmy Rabbitte: *Sing Street*'s Eamon – who can play as many instruments as sit unused in his front room, owing to his dad being in a covers band and, for the moment, in a treatment centre for alcoholics – owns an unknowable number of hutchless pet rabbits.

It seems unlikely that this is the first time that Parker – director of *Bugsy Malone* (1976), *Fame* (1980) and *Evita* (1996) – has had an influence on Carney's career. There aren't many European directors who have contributed as much to the musical movie genre as these two – Carney's *Sing Street* reprises the successful formula of his earlier features *Once* (2007) and *Begin Again* (2013).

The original musical numbers in Carney's three romances are diegetic. Where *Once* centred on two struggling Dublin musicians rehearsing and recording their songs, and *Begin Again* hinged on the idea of an unsigned artist recording her album live rather than in a studio, *Sing Street* has a music video – a moderately new phenomenon in 1985, when the film is set – provide the real-time openings for song.

The film centres on 15-year-old Conor (Ferdia Walsh-Peelo), who hasn't a thought in his head as he approaches Raphina, the attractive girl standing on the far side of the street. The fiction that escapes his mouth – that he's in a band and wants a model for a music video – can be traced to *Top of the Pops* the night before, and his brother Brendan's impassioned gloss on the cultural impact of Duran Duran's 'Rio'. The two black eyes Conor wears that day, courtesy of a skinhead bully, are a foreshadowing of the



Step brothers: Jack Reynor, Ferdia Walsh-Peelo

kohl eyeliner he'll sport as frontman of Sing Street, the pop band he pulls together with Eamon and three other fellow misfits, and whose first song impresses Raphina sufficiently that she turns up for the video shoot.

That the entire plot bubbles upwards from this one small instant of impulsiveness is typical of *Sing Street*. The story beats of Carney's script are so fused with teenage extemporaneity that they disappear, and the film floats along with the aimless conviction of a helium balloon let go; and one would no more argue with the film's twists and turns or the nerve of its bracing ending than query the plausibility of the harum-scarum exploits of a bunch of hormonal kids.

Having hits such as Hall & Oates's 'Maneater' side by side on the soundtrack with original songs shows how confident a filmmaker Carney has become. (He has every reason to be confident – by and large, the songs bear comparison.) He draws outstanding performances from a cast of mostly first-time actors, whose comic timing is razor-sharp. The boys' attempts to emulate the fashions of the era's male pop stars (John Taylor's bleached fringe, Spandau Ballet's cravats) are persistently funny, as are their attempts to replicate, on a budget, the just-so arbitrariness of, say, the white coat stand in the video for The Jam's 'Town Called Malice'.

Frequently moving and start-to-finish funny, *Sing Street* is the essence of charm: thoroughly enjoyable, leaving one elated and (not unpleasantly) empty-headed. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
 Anthony Bregman  
 Martina Niland  
 John Carney  
**Written by**  
 John Carney  
**Story**  
 John Carney  
 Simon Carmody  
**Director of Photography**  
 Yaron Orbach  
**Editors**

Andrew Marcus  
 Julian Ulrichs  
**Production Designer**  
 Alan MacDonald  
**Original Songs**  
 Gary Clark  
 John Carney  
**Sound Mixer**  
 Robert Flanagan  
**Costume Designer**  
 Tiziana Convisieri  
 @Cosmo Films  
 Limited

**Production Companies**  
 Merced Media and  
 PalmStar Media  
 Capital present  
 in association  
 with FilmNation  
 Entertainment with  
 the participation of  
 Bord Scannán Na  
 hÉireann/the Irish  
 Film Board a Likely  
 Story, FilmWave,  
 Limited

Distressed Films,  
 Cosmo Films  
 production  
 A John Carney Film  
**Executive Producers**  
 Kevin Frakes  
 Raj Brinder Singh  
 Bob Weinstein  
 Harvey Weinstein  
**Cast**  
 Lucy Boynton

Raphina  
 Maria Doyle  
 Kennedy  
 Penny  
 Aidan Gillen  
 Robert  
 Jack Reynor  
 Brendan  
 Kelly Thornton  
 Ann  
 Ferdia Walsh-Peelo  
 Conor, 'Cosmo'  
 Ben Carolan

Darren  
 Mark McKenna  
 Eamon  
 Don Wycherley  
 Brother Baxter  
**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
**[2.35:1]**  
**Distributor**  
 Lionsgate UK

Dublin, 1985. Financial difficulties mean that 15-year-old Conor must move from his private Jesuit school to the state school on Synge Street. When he arrives wearing brown shoes instead of regulation black, it marks the beginning of a bad relationship with stern headmaster Brother Baxter. Trying to engage the interest of a good-looking girl, Raphina, Conor tells her that he's in a band and needs a model for a music video. With the help of friend Darren and multi-instrumentalist Eamon, Conor forms 'Sing Street'. Raphina turns up for the video shoot. Conor's older

brother Brendan schools him in contemporary pop music. Conor and Raphina kiss during the second video shoot. Conor's parents announce their separation. The band decide to play the end-of-year school disco. Defaulting on the third shoot, Raphina – who lives in a care home – is discovered to have gone to London with her much older boyfriend. When this doesn't work out, she returns to Dublin and reunites with Conor at the disco. The next day at dawn, Brendan drives the young lovers to Bullock Harbour; they set off for England in Conor's grandfather's motorboat.

## Streetdance Family

Directors: Debbie Shuter, Adam Tysoe  
 Certificate 12A 88m 6s

### Reviewed by Anna Smith

"Sometimes I doubt your commitment to Sparkle Motion," is one of *Donnie Darko*'s most memorable comic lines, and it springs to mind when watching *Streetdance Family*. A documentary following the UK under-16s streetdance troupe Entity Allstars, it focuses on the parents and volunteers who take the endeavour just as seriously as their fictional counterparts, as they travel to the World Championships with their talented children. Most evangelical – and entertaining – is the group's adult leader, Tashan Muir, who's prone to prayer sessions and motivational speeches ("There's a reason they tried to crush us... we've been through too much now. Go out there and do it!").

Directed by Debbie Shuter (*Safe Haven*) and her partner Adam Tysoe, the film combines training and competition footage with interviews that reveal the tensions within the team. The dancing is terrific and the personalities engaging, though more footage of the other competitors would have achieved greater balance. Shuter and Tysoe have an eye for a good story but, as parents of a dancer in the group, they stay close to the team to a fault. No one can doubt their commitment to Entity Allstars. **S**



Troupers: Streetdance Family

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producer**  
 Debbie Shuter  
**Director of Photography**  
 Adam Tysoe  
**Editor**  
 Adam Tysoe  
**Original Music**  
 Composed by  
 Julien Jaouen  
**Sound**  
 Debbie Shuter

**Production Companies**  
 And Films presents  
 an Insight Films  
 production in  
 association with  
 Lipsync Productions  
**Executive Producers**  
 John Stevens  
 Jeremy Palin  
 Norman Merry  
 Fran Robertson

**In Colour**  
**[1.78:1]**  
**Distributor**  
 Insight Films

Germany, September 2014. British streetdance crew Entity Allstars are competing in the under-16s World Hip Hop Championships. Choreographer Tashan Muir explains how committed he is to the group.

East London, eight months earlier. Parents, children and volunteers praise the benefits of the group. Entity Allstars qualify for the European Championships. They are threatened with disqualification due to a technicality but proceed to the World Championships. A parent withdraws his child after having an argument with Muir, but the boy returns. After further fallouts and controversy, Entity win the World Championships.



## Suburra

Italy/France 2015  
Director: Stefano Sollima

### Reviewed by Hannah McGill

In an interesting, sign-of-the-times reversal of the custom whereby successful television series were once rewarded with a spin-off feature film, this feature film serves as a launchpad for a Netflix series, the online platform's first Italian production. Director Stefano Sollima has helped to set the precedent for this order of events, having worked on two television series based on successful films, *Gomorra* and *Romanzo Criminale*. No one familiar with the content of those two projects will be surprised to learn that this latest work concerns itself generally with corruption and corruptibility, and specifically with the connections between organised crime and government.

Based on a novel by Giancarlo De Cataldo (also author of the source novel for *Romanzo Criminale*) and Carlo Bonini, *Suburra* is set in November 2011, against the backdrop of an Italian prime minister coming under increasing pressure to resign and a pope taking the unprecedented step of abdicating. In reality, Pope Benedict stepped down some 14 months after Silvio Berlusconi did, in 2013, although he was presumably thinking it over for a while. The elision, in any case, allows the film to present the two events as mystically if not directly connected: harbingers of a country's imminent moral collapse. A violent rainstorm adds to the sense of things falling apart; and onscreen captions note the number of days until "the Apocalypse".

This invocation of infernal forces arguably rather lessens the film's impact as moral drama or social commentary, suggesting that the characters are being helplessly propelled towards disaster rather than making their own self-serving choices. It's effective, however, in emphasising the scale of the corruption and hypocrisy involved. Only one character in a crowded dramatis personae doesn't get by on lying, cheating

and killing – and that's only because she dies of a crack overdose in an early scene.

If the demise of this character, Jelena (Yulia Kolomiets), is a brilliantly deployed plot device, triggering a domino effect of interconnected dramas, the way the film treats her is indicative of a certain double standard. The sex in which she engages just before her death, with corrupt politician Malgradi (Pierfrancesco Favino) and prostitute Sabrina (Giulia Goriotti), is given graphic, glossy and lingering treatment. Thereafter, we find that Jelena was underage, and Malgradi's use of the body we were just invited to ogle becomes evidence of his depravity. For the film to wallow thus in the same corruption it affects to abhor might be considered either Hitchcockian moral playfulness or simple hypocrisy – but certainly we find out no more about Jelena once her plot function is discharged.

Wanton glamorisation is hardly unusual in accounts of the lifestyles of the rich and infamous; and perhaps in this case it simply expresses an ongoing need within Italian culture to both exorcise and exploit its recent institutional traumas. Still, the film's most affecting storyline concerns not the obviously monstrous Malgradi but low-key Sebastiano (Elio Germano), a party organiser whose father's suicide suddenly lands him in serious Mafia debt and brings him face to face with what he will do to survive. Sebastiano's story also takes the film to its most memorable physical space: a villa stuffed with vulgar antiques and overrun with shrieking children, at the heart of which mob boss Manfredi Anacleti hacks up meat with a cleaver. Like the corrupt churchmen and politicians to whom his business links him – or the devil, who's possibly behind it all – this is a figure from a nightmare, at once terrifying and absurd. If Sebastiano is relatively innocent when he makes Manfredi's acquaintance, we know he isn't going to stay that way. **B**

## The Sweeney Paris

France/United Kingdom 2015  
Director: Benjamin Rocher  
Certificate 15 93m 3s

### Reviewed by Jason Anderson

Tracing a very squiggly line from John Thaw to Ray Winstone to Jean Reno, *The Sweeney: Paris* – released last year in France as *Antigang* – is a Paris-set remake of Nick Love's 2012 cop thriller *The Sweeney*, itself of course a contemporary revamp of the eponymous mid-1970s TV drama and its two feature-film spin-offs. They, in turn, were inspired by the real-life exploits of the Flying Squad, the specialised branch of London's Metropolitan Police Service that was founded to foil armed robberies just like the one taking place in the new film's opening moments.

Director Benjamin Rocher essentially replicates the same sequence that began Love's effort, with the members of his squad again enjoying some banter while their vehicles race towards a crime in progress. Yet several variations reflect a very different cultural sensibility: in Love's film, the primary topic of conversation was the unattractiveness of one squad member's new fiancée, an accurate suggestion of the lads'-mag misogyny and repellent thuggishness that permeated the whole exercise. (Even Winstone seemed embarrassed by his Cockney Dirty Harry routine.) Here, the fact that a new member is about to turn 28 prompts a rumination on Kurt Cobain, Jimi Hendrix and all the other rock legends who didn't live past 27. Another squad member notes that Jean-Michel Basquiat died at the same age. In a touch so quintessentially Gallic that it risks becoming self-parody, their captain Serge Buren (played by Reno) shuts down the chatter by declaring that the only musical luminary truly worthy of their respect is Johnny Hallyday.

This is not the only indication that Rocher is aware of the fundamentally absurd nature of his mission to put a continental spin on Britain's hardest vessel of cops-and-robbers clichés. He highlights a perennial problem in the film industry, which is that it wastes so many resources trying to remake great films when it could be improving mediocre ones – though not much better than perfunctory, *The Sweeney: Paris* trumps Love's film in nearly every regard.

That's thanks in large part to how well screenwriters François Loubeyre and Tristan Schulmann – part of the team behind *La Horde*, the 2009 cops-vs-gangsters-vs-zombies shoot-'em-up that Rocher co-directed with Yannick Dahan – have streamlined the original's overburdened storyline, shedding 20 minutes that never needed to be there. Rocher also displays a sharper knack both for the

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Riccardo Tozzi  
Giovanni Stabellini  
Marco Chimenz  
**Screenplay**  
Sandro Petraglia  
Stefano Rulli  
Giancarlo De Cataldo  
Carlo Bonini  
**Story**  
Giancarlo De Cataldo  
Carlo Bonini  
Sandro Petraglia  
Stefano Rulli  
Based on the novel  
by Giancarlo De

#### Cataldo, Carlo Bonini

#### Cinematography

Paolo Carnera

#### Editor

Patrizio Marone

#### Art Director

Paki Meduri

#### Sound Recordist

Maricetta Lombardo

#### Costumes

Veronica Fragola

©Cattleya S.R.L.,  
La Chauve Souris

#### Production Companies

Cattleya and Rai

Cinema presents a

Cattleya, La Chauve

Souris co-production

with Rai Cinema

A film by Stefano

Sollima

Produced by Cattleya

with Rai Cinema

A co-production

with La Chauve

Souris, Cofinova 11

and Cinéma 9

With the participation

of Canal+, Ciné+,

Indie Sales, Indie

Invest. Haut et

Court Distribution

In association

with Groupama

Assicurazioni,

EsseQuamVideri,

Camelot

#### Executive Producer

Matteo De Laurentiis

#### Cast

Pierfrancesco Favino

Filippo Malgradi

Elio Germano

Sebastiano

Claudio Amendola

Samurai

Alessandro Borghi

Numéro 8

Greta Scarano

Viola

Giulia Elettra Goriotti

Sabrina

Antonello Fassari

Sebastiano's father

Jean-Hugues

Anglade

Cardinal Berchet

In Colour

[1.85:1]

#### Subtitles

#### Distributor

Kaleidoscope Film

Distribution

**Rome, 2011.** Italy faces financial disarray, and both the prime minister and the Pope are on the cusp of resignation. A consortium of crime families headed by veteran mafioso Samurai is working on a huge property deal in the coastal suburb of Ostia. Member of parliament Filippo Malgradi spends a drug-fuelled evening with prostitutes Sabrina and Jelena, in the course of which the latter overdoses and dies. 'Dagger' Anacleti helps Sabrina to dispose of the body. When his father commits suicide, Sabrina's friend Sebastiano inherits huge debts to Dagger's brother Manfredi. Dagger attempts to blackmail Malgradi over Jelena's death; Malgradi sends rival

thug Aureliano to scare him off, but Aureliano kills him. Sebastiano betrays Sabrina to Manfredi as a witness in his brother's murder; Sabrina in turn betrays Malgradi. With Sebastiano as accomplice, Manfredi blackmails Malgradi into enabling the waterfront deal, kidnapping his son as collateral. When Manfredi still refuses to write off his debts, Sebastiano kills him. Fearing that his recklessness will endanger the seafront development, Samurai kills Aureliano. Jelena's body is found, and Malgradi is told that he faces investigation. Protesters against government corruption gather at the parliament. Aureliano's girlfriend Viola kills Samurai.



Bande à part: Jean Reno



major set pieces – largely rendered in the slick and brutal Euro-action style of Luc Besson – and the moments of blokey humour that fill out the spaces between the gunfights and car chases. (Again, the most protracted example of the former occurs in a tourist-heavy location, Rocher trading the original's Trafalgar Square for France's National Library.)

A more melancholy figure than his burly counterpart in *The Sweeney*, Reno lends Buren an air of world-weariness that's all too plausible given how often the actor has performed his taciturn tough-guy routine since *La Femme Nikita* (1990) and *Léon* (1994). An enterprising French producer should cast him in a remake of *Lethal Weapon* just so that we can have the pleasure of hearing him grumble, "Je deviens trop vieux pour cette merde." ☹

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Raphaël Rocher  
Henri Debeurme  
Thierry Desmichelie  
Lionel Uzan  
James Richardson  
Allan Niblo  
**Screenplay and Dialogue**  
Tristan Schulmann  
**Adaptation**  
Tristan Schulmann  
François Loubeyre  
Based on an original story by Nick Love, John Hodge  
**Cinematography**  
Jean-François Hensgens  
**Editors**  
Sébastien de Sainte Croix  
Dimitri Amar  
**Art Director**  
Laure Lepelley-Monbillard  
**Original Music**  
Laurent Perez Del Mar  
**Sound**  
Guillaume Le Bras  
Gurwal Coic-Gallas  
Sébastien Pierre  
**Costumes**

Marion Moulès  
Matthieu Cambor  
  
©Captute The Flag Films, SND, Vertigo Films, M6 Films, Les Films de la Suane  
**Production Companies**  
SND, Captute (The Flag) Films presents a SND, Captute (The Flag) Films, Vertigo Films, M6 Films, Les Films de la Suane production  
With the participation of OCS, M6, W9

**Cast**  
Jean Reno  
Serge Buren  
Caterina Murino  
Margaux  
Alban Lenoir  
Cartier  
Thierry Neuvic  
Becker  
Steffi Celma  
Ricci  
Oumar Diaw  
Manu

**Sébastien Lalanne**  
Genoves  
**Jean-Toussaint Bernard**  
Boulez  
**Jakob Cedergren**  
Kasper  
**Sabrina Ouazani**  
Nadia  
**Féodor Atkine**  
Tancrede

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
Subtitles

**Distributor**  
Vertigo Films

French theatrical title  
**Antigang**

Paris, present day. Led by police captain Serge Buren, a special anti-gang squad intervenes during a warehouse robbery, using aggressive tactics to capture the thieves. After celebrating with his team, Buren is instructed by his new superior Becker to tone down his unorthodox methods. Buren is having an affair with Becker's wife Margaux, also a member of his team. Acting on an informant's tip, Buren and his partner Cartier investigate a private bank that has reputedly been targeted. When a jewellery store is robbed and a bystander murdered, Buren's prime suspect is Kasper, an old nemesis. After staking out his hideout, the squad captures Kasper, but Buren discovers evidence pointing to another perpetrator. Taking over the case, Becker tries to stop an apparent robbery by the new suspect; Buren realises it's a decoy engineered by Kasper to distract the police from the real target: the bank. There, Buren's squad encounters the masked thieves; Kasper kills Margaux in the ensuing battle. Becker suspends and detains Buren. Cartier learns that Kasper's gang is about to strike again while the bank is transferring its contents to a safer location. Buren is freed by Becker. He and his squad stop the robbery and capture Kasper. Buren leaves Becker to decide whether to arrest or kill Kasper, before walking away with Cartier.

## These Final Hours

Australia/USA/France 2013

Director: Zak Hilditch

Certificate 15 86m 57s

### Reviewed by Samuel Wigley

This apocalyptic Australian actioner gives a resoundingly misanthropic treatment to the old hypothetical about how you'd choose to spend your last hours on earth. As the film opens, a giant meteor has collided with our planet somewhere in the North Atlantic, sending a firestorm around the globe that destroys everything in its wake. In Perth, Western Australia, residents know total destruction is a matter of 12 hours away, and their civilisation has accordingly disintegrated into a nihilistic, end-of-days hell in which lawlessness and unfettered hedonism hold sway.

In the spirit of the noble tradition of Antipodean end-of-the-world narratives stretching from *On the Beach* (1959) and *The Last Wave* (1977) to George Miller's *Mad Max* series, Zak Hilditch's *These Final Hours* effectively conveys this atmosphere of hopeless dread. Despite a low budget and minimal special effects, the film deftly suggests the deterioration of Perth's suburban sprawl into a nightmare landscape. Bodies are seen lying in the roads and suicides hanging from streetlights, while the sun-bleached photography instils an appropriate sense of a planet that's sizzling to its doom.

But few of us would seek out protagonist James (Nathan Phillips) as our friend for the end of the world. In an over-accelerated opening, the apocalyptic scenario is set up with only the broadest of brushstrokes as the focus narrows on to a comparatively trifling domestic drama in which James's selfish motivations are as difficult to understand as they are to care about. On learning that his lover Zoe (Jessica De Gouw) is pregnant with his child, he flees her company in favour of spending his final hours with a girlfriend at a debauched, out-of-town rave-up. It's a curious step for any film to establish its hero as a two-timing responsibility-phobe; in this case, the approach of an all-engulfing firestorm also seems to make James's fear of fatherhood somewhat beside the point.

Via the timeworn device of a young girl's



End of days: Nathan Phillips, Jessica De Gouw

innocence, *These Final Hours* inevitably reroutes James to redemption. Rescuing Rose (Angourie Rice) from potential rapists and agreeing to help her find her father, James slowly and predictably learns a duty of care and the errors of his ways. Not, however, before he's taken Rose along with him to the party, where a crazed woman mistakes her for her own daughter and feeds her ecstasy. This overextended scene unappealingly portrays a self-serving society dancing to its grave, while doubling as an opportunity to dispense with any potentially complicating audience sympathy for James's (as it turns out) ghostly girlfriend.

The film's subsequent turn into more sentimental territory works better. Making an appealing foil to the conventional brawn of Phillips's James, Rice gives easily the most affecting performance here, essaying a range of emotions that seem beyond the grown-ups. But with tidy lessons learned, Hilditch brings us to his finale briskly yet with a sense of redundancy. You can't help but think that when the end of the world does come, it will throw up lots of individual stories. For all its technical prowess, *These Final Hours* has chosen the wrong one. ☹

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Liz Kearney  
**Written by**  
Zak Hilditch  
**Director of Photography**  
Bonnie Elliott  
**Edited by**  
Nick Meyers  
**Editor**  
Meredith Watson  
Jeffrey  
**Production Designer**  
Nigel Devenport  
**Composer**  
Cornel Wilczek  
**Sound Designer**  
Emma Bortignon  
**Costume Designer**  
Marcia Ball

©8th in Line  
Productions Pty Ltd.  
Filmfest Limited,  
Screen Australia  
and ScreenWest  
**Production Companies**  
ScreenWest, Lottery  
West and 8th in Line

Productions present  
in association with  
Screen Australia,  
Melbourne  
International Film  
Festival Premiere  
Fund, XYZ Films and  
Celluloid Nightmares  
Financed in  
association with  
Fulcrum Media  
Finance  
Produced with the  
financial assistance of  
the Melbourne  
International Film  
Festival (MIFF)  
Premiere Fund  
Developed and  
financed with the  
assistance of  
Screen Australia  
Developed and  
produced with the  
assistance of  
ScreenWest and  
LotteryWest  
**Executive Producer**  
Robert Connolly

**Cast**  
Nathan Phillips  
James  
Angourie Rice  
Rose  
Jessica de Gouw  
Zoe  
Kathryn Beck  
Vicky  
Daniel Henshall  
Freddy  
Sarah Snook  
Mandy's mum  
Lynette Curran  
James's mum

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
The Works UK  
Distribution

Perth, Australia, present day. A meteor crashes into the North Atlantic, triggering a firestorm that's spreading around the planet. With annihilation expected within 12 hours, society in Perth has broken down, and looting and violence have broken out. Discovering that his lover Zoe is pregnant, James leaves her to meet girlfriend Vicki at a wild party happening out of town. En route, he rescues a young girl, Rose, from kidnappers. He takes Rose to visit his sister but finds the family dead, so he decides to take her along with him to the party. Amid the chaos of the event, where some of the guests play Russian roulette, Vicki shows James a bunker where she intends to live out the apocalypse. They argue over it. Meanwhile Rose falls into the clutches of a woman who, thinking Rose is her own daughter, gives her an ecstasy pill. Rose is freed when Vicki shoots the woman dead, allowing James to leave with Rose. James reconciles with his estranged mother, who gives him enough petrol to drive Rose to reunite with her family. At her family's home, however, they find that a mass suicide has taken place. James tells Rose that he walked out on Zoe and she encourages him to go back to her, leaving Rose to be with her dead father until the end.

James finds Zoe on a beach. They watch together as the firestorm approaches over the ocean.



## Troublemakers

USA 2015  
Director: James Crump

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

James Crump's thoroughgoing and consistently interesting documentary about America's Land Art movement contains a nice anecdote by Charles Ross about how he found the site for his enormous *Star Axis* installation. He was scouting out locations in the New Mexico desert and happened to meet a cowboy "who looked like the Marlboro Man". Ross explained his plan: he wanted to create a naked-eye observatory to bring earth and sky into dialogue, and he'd need about a square mile of land. "A square mile? We've got plenty of those," the cowboy shrugged. "Why don't you just drive around and pick one out?" The encounter epitomises Land Art's curious mixture of metaphysical enquiry and no-nonsense gruffness, not to mention its fundamental reliance on America's inexhaustible supply of empty wilderness. But most of all, it sums up the artists' enthusiastic appropriation of a particular construct of maleness. There's nothing delicate about Land Art, no mucking about with watercolours. You'll need your boots, a pickaxe and a cowboy hat. Especially a cowboy hat.

Michael Heizer adopted a cowboy hat in the 1960s and never looked back. Handsome, clever and very, very cool, he is one of the trio of charismatic pioneers that Crump focuses on as he attempts to explain why the Land Art movement was so important. Heizer's dad was an archaeologist, and young Mike inherited from him a certain penchant for digging in the dirt. But, like his contemporaries Robert Smithson and Walter De Maria, he was less interested in what



Natural resources: *Troublemakers*

the land contained than in leaving a mark upon it. Although the film is relatively uninterested in the movement's aesthetic antecedents, its opening section argues convincingly that two historical events inspired it: the dawning of the space age, which allowed people to see the Earth as an object to be played with and written on; and the Vietnam War, with its shocking aerial footage of landscapes devastated by fires and bomb-craters. Indeed, there is something both playful and violent about many of the works highlighted here. Heizer's *Double Negative* – a massive trench cut across a mesa – is a deliberately confrontational intrusion into the landscape; Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* is a mischievous doodle that becomes a startling provocation when its scale and ambition are fully comprehended.

The film packs a lot into its 72 minutes, though there's no time to consider Land Art's intersections with wider culture – it would have been interesting to ponder its relationship with a film like *Easy Rider* (1969), for instance. Archive footage of the groovy New York milieu from which the artists sprang (and from which they fled into the desert) mixes to atmospheric effect with new interviews with important critics, artists and curators. These include Virginia Dwan, the woman who generously bankrolled the early years with her vast personal wealth, since Land Art is radically uncommercial and can't be bought or sold.

Meanwhile Ross is still out there in the desert, still building *Star Axis* more than 40 years later. And Heizer, though sadly not interviewed here, is in Nevada, where he continues to work on *City*, a series of sculptural complexes that he started in 1972. When you're dealing in cosmic perspectives, time and money don't seem to matter much. **S**

## Truman

Spain/Argentina 2015  
Director: Cesc Gay  
Certificate 15 109m 12s

Reviewed by Maria Delgado

Since making his debut feature *Hotel Room* in 1998, Cesc Gay has proved one of Spain's most original and underrated directors, his work ranging from crisp, existentialist drama (*In the City*, 2003) to smart romantic comedy (*V.O.S.*, 2009). His films are concerned with the forces of modernity and their impact on traditions and conventions; his characters often find themselves caught between desires that cannot easily be satisfied and wider obligations that serve to create narrative tension and conflict. Crucially, Gay's films have 'grown' alongside him: *Nico and Dani* (2000) was a coming-of-age tale; *Fiction* (2006) a subtle study of sexual attraction and infidelity among thirtysomethings; and *A Gun in Each Hand* (2012) an interrogation of fortysomething male crisis. And now *Truman*, Gay's seventh feature, turns to mortality, as a fiftysomething 'odd couple' of tested friends, played by Ricardo Darín and Javier Cámara, deal with terminal illness over four final days together.

Gay had already deployed Cámara's comic persona and Darín's everyman qualities to potent effect in the portmanteau *A Gun in Each Hand*. While *Truman* shares the lithe quality of that earlier film, there is also something here of Daniel Burman's exacting eye for the sly humour in oddball characters, which could, in lesser hands, all too easily fall into stereotype. Like Burman, Gay is very good at revealing undercurrents that are never overtly articulated. (The film is co-produced by Burman and Diego Dubcovsky's BD Cine.) Darín's Julián and Cámara's Tomás are complex beings whose humanity and mortality (wrinkled brows, sallowness, ailments, flaws) are consistently foregrounded, and the two leads give a masterclass in unfussy, low-key acting (a shared award at San Sebastián has been followed by a Goya each).

The film is in many ways a variation on Gay's earlier romcoms – only here the romantic pairing is refashioned through the conventions of the buddy movie. Julián is a stage actor who, diagnosed with terminal cancer, wants to put his affairs in order; Tomás is the



Two amigos: Javier Cámara, Ricardo Darín

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> James Crump	<b>@Summitridge</b> Pictures and RSJC LLC	<b>Colour and</b> <b>Black &amp; White</b> [2.35:1]
<b>Producer</b> Farley Ziegler Michael Comte	<b>Production</b> <b>Companies</b> Summitridge Pictures presents a film by James Crump	<b>Distributor</b> Dogwoof
<b>Cinematography</b> Alex Themistocleous Robert O'Hare	<b>Executive Producer</b> Ronnie Sasson	<b>End credits title</b> <b>Troublemakers: The</b> <b>Story of Land Art</b>
<b>Edited by</b> Nick Tamburri	<b>intro narration</b> James Crump	
<b>Sound Design</b> Gary Gegan Rick Ash		

A documentary examining the origins and development of the Land Art movement in the 1960s and 1970s. The film focuses particularly on three artists: Michael Heizer, whose most famous work is 'Double Negative', a huge trench cut across two edges of a natural mesa formation in Nevada; Robert Smithson, best known for 'Spiral Jetty', a manmade strip of rock that curls out into the Great Salt Lake in Utah; and Walter De Maria, whose seminal work is 'The Lightning Field', a mile-long grid of steel poles in New Mexico, designed to attract lightning. Heizer and Smithson appear in archive interviews, and there are also new interviews with those involved in the burgeoning scene of the time, including gallerist Virginia Dwan and Guggenheim curator Germano Celant. The film argues that the movement emerged from a desire to bring art out of the confines of the gallery, and to provide intense experiences for those who made and experienced it. Its lack of commercial potential, however, meant that the artists depended entirely on patronage, particularly from the wealthy Dwan. Such financial freedom allowed them to pursue work purely for its conceptual richness, and the film presents the artists as untamed spirits at one with the landscape they work in.



close friend who has returned from Canada to visit him. On the one hand Julián is sanguine about his impending death, dragging the unprepared Tomás with him to the funeral parlour to deal with the practicalities of dying; on the other, he is preoccupied by the spiritual aspects of what may await him, ringing the more measured Tomás in the middle of the night with questions about whether his father will be there to greet him when he gets to the gates of the world beyond.

The focus of much of Julián's concern is his ageing, drooling bullmastiff Truman, who actually appears more worn out than his dying owner. This strand of the story is played out in a number of beautifully judged scenarios defined by droll black humour. Julián interrogates the bemused vet on how his pet might be prepared to cope with his loss, propelling Tomás to the nearest bookshop in search of texts on animal psychology; Agata Roca (Gay's wife, and a regular in his films) is very funny as one earnest half of the same-sex couple looking to adopt Truman; Julián insists on auditioning prospective owners for the dog, these interviews providing further revelations about his foibles and obsessions.

Julián is seeking to craft the final act of his life: "Each person dies as best they can," he insists. But not all things can be neatly tied up as in the denouement of a play. Julián's meeting with his son Nico (Oriol Pla) sidesteps discussion of his true condition, though a final desperate embrace between them conveys what can't be said; Julián and Tomás silently hold hands across the twin beds in the latter's hotel room in a moment of unassuming intimacy. Gay's ability to subtly reveal unspoken feelings is just one of *Truman's* many strengths, creating a nuanced and highly watchable tale of friendship tested through adversity. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Marta Esteban Diego Dubcovsky	Anna Güell	<b>Dolores Fonzi</b> Paula
<b>Written by</b> Cesc Gay Tomás Aragay	© Impossible Films, S.L./Trumanfilm AIE/BD Cine S.L.	<b>Oriol Pla</b> Nico
<b>Director of Photography</b> Andreu Rebés	<b>Production Companies</b> Impossible Films, BD Cine, Trumanfilm	<b>Agata Roca</b> woman 1
<b>Editor</b> Pablo Barbieri	<b>Executive Producer</b> Marta Esteban	<b>Dolby Digital</b> <b>In Colour</b> [1.85:1] Subtitles
<b>Art Director</b> Irene Montcada	<b>Cast</b> <b>Ricardo Darín</b> Julián <b>Javier Cámara</b> Tomás	<b>Distributor</b> Studiocanal Limited
<b>Music</b> Nico Cota Toti Soler		
<b>Sound Mixer</b> Jessica Suarez		
<b>Costume Designer</b>		

Madrid, the present. University lecturer Tomás travels from Canada to see his friend Julián, who has terminal cancer. Over four days, Tomás accompanies Julián as he puts his affairs in order and visits his son Nico in Amsterdam. They meet with Julián's cousin Paula, who is finding it difficult to cope with Julián's attitude to his impending death. Julián interviews potential new owners for his beloved dog Truman. Tomás and Paula spend the night together. The following morning, at the airport, Julián hands Truman over to Tomás with all the paperwork for travel and immigration. Tomás returns to Canada with the dog.

## The Trust

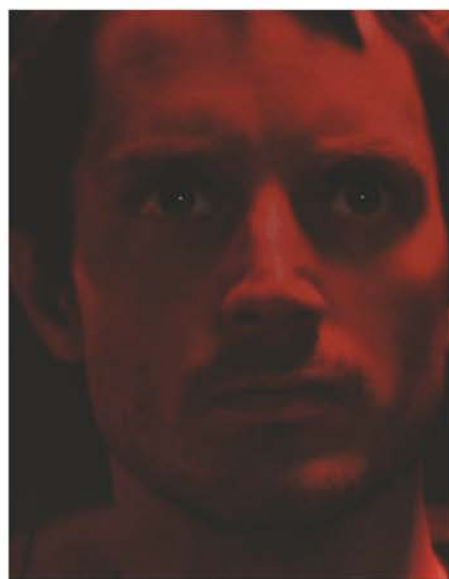
United Kingdom/USA 2016  
Directors: Alex Brewer, Benjamin Brewer

### Reviewed by Tim Hayes

The progress of Nicolas Cage through the all but direct-to-video market has produced a regular churn of films with prefab titles and some hollow laughter at the actor's expense from the peanut gallery, but his quality control hasn't atrophied altogether. Last year alone yielded the perfunctory *Pay the Ghost*, in which his character rescued his child from some cardboard supernatural hoodoo, and also *The Runner*, a more robust look at a politician's moral collapse in post-Deepwater Horizon Louisiana, which saw the reliable pairing of Cage and Connie Nielsen. And above and beyond those, there was *Dying of the Light*, a pessimistic distillation of the war on terror into an ugly vendetta between two sick men, on which the fingerprints of director Paul Schrader could vaguely be discerned, even after his inevitable repudiation of the final re-edited and woefully scored film. Cage may have some responsibility for the distinct sets of mannerisms deployed in each scenario, but can hardly be blamed for the fact that all the box covers look the same.

*The Trust* finds Cage acting up and acting out on a higher level than any of those – and in a law-enforcement storyline to boot, immediately activating the antennae of anyone who enjoyed Werner Herzog's *Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call New Orleans* (2009), wherein Cage aimed for the moon and overshot. Directors Alex and Benjamin Brewer are nowhere close to idiosyncrasy on Herzog's scale, and as it transpires have their eye on a different director altogether, but they clearly allowed the actor a certain amount of room to rave. Thick of moustache and hard of head, Cage's fallible, greedy Las Vegas cop coerces his meeker colleague (Elijah Wood) into a dubious attempt to rob some obviously dangerous men through a tactile browbeating, which starts funny and becomes suitably creepy. Equally odd is what might be going on between the cop and his father, whose brittle disappointment with his son is barely explored in the character's 60 seconds of screen time, even though all 60 involve no less inexplicable a presence than Jerry Lewis.

The film's actual guiding star is fairly clear from the start, when Wood's cop has joyless sex with a call girl and fixates on a birthmark



Red alert: Elijah Wood

below her breasts while 'Tipping Strings' by The Knights shimmers on the soundtrack. All cards are duly laid out on the table when the grocery store central to the plot turns out to be called Red Apple, Quentin Tarantino's fictional cigarette brand of choice. Full allegiance to a Tarantino world comes when a character signposted as enjoyably oddball abruptly murders someone, although the following hour in his company lacks Tarantino's exuberant pleasure in exploring consequences through structure and dialogue – or in the potential narrative uses of a woman tied up in a bathroom, for that matter.

*The Trust* starts off outdoors in night-time Vegas before heading into a set of sealed rooms and corridors – it's strikingly shot by Sean Porter, whose eye for claustrophobia is obvious in Jeremy Saulnier's *Green Room* – but any narrowing of focus on to the character of the men in them becomes a general slog through indistinct machismo, untrustworthy trustees and a bad wicked world. Advocates of running Cage out of town will, however, have to come back and try again. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

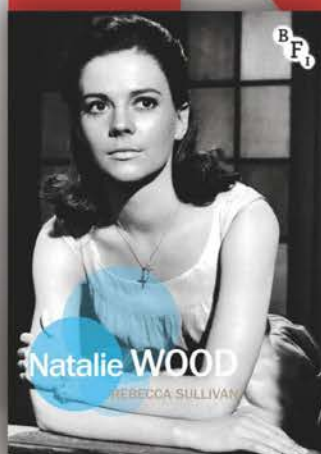
<b>Produced by</b> Brad Schlei Mike Nilon Braxton Pope Molly Hassell	<b>Production Designer</b> Scott Kuzio	presents a Hassell-Free production in association with Ingenious Media, Saban Films, The Electric Shadow Company, Prettybird	Arianne Fraser Delphine Perrier Jeff Rice Lee Broda Jason Miller Charles Auty Megan Forde Simon Williams Ted Cawrey William V. Bromiley Ness Saban Julie Kroll
<b>Written by</b> Benjamin Brewer Adam Hirsch	<b>Music</b> Reza Safinia	Produced by Saeculum Productions Limited	<b>Cast</b> <b>Nicolas Cage</b> Jim Stone <b>Elijah Wood</b> David Waters <b>Sky Ferreira</b> woman <b>Jerry Lewis</b> Stone's father
<b>Director of Photography</b> Sean Porter	<b>Sound Designer</b> Samuel Aronson	<b>Executive Producers</b> John Jencks Henry Winterstern	<b>[1.85:1]</b> <b>Distributor</b> Signature Entertainment
<b>Editor</b> Lauren Connelly	<b>Costume Designer</b> Mona May		<b>In Colour</b> <b>Colour by</b> Runway
	<b>Production Companies</b> ©Vault Film, LLC Highland Film Group		

Las Vegas, the present. Police officers Jim Stone and David Waters learn that a drug dealer and his team are keeping large amounts of cash in a grocery store. David obtains blueprints for the building, which show that a fortified vault has been installed. The pair decide to break in via the apartment above the store and steal the cash. Jim obtains weapons for the task, and casually murders the gun supplier. Entering the apartment, Jim and David encounter a woman,

whom they restrain before accessing the vault and discovering that it contains a large hoard of diamonds. David has increasing reservations and allows the woman to make a phone call regarding her young son. When Jim wants to dispose of her, David reluctantly shoots him and returns the diamonds to the vault. He leaves with the woman, intending to free her, but they are pursued. David realises that the woman called the dealers. He is shot dead by an anonymous gunman.

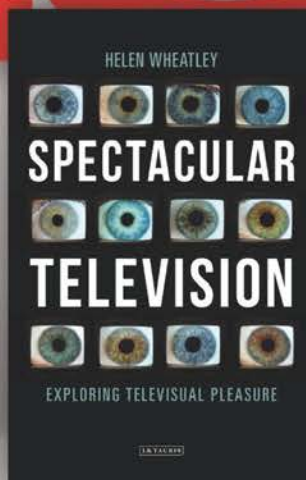


# Read



## NATALIE WOOD

By Rebecca Sullivan, BFI Publishing/  
Palgrave, 160pp, paperback,  
£16.99, ISBN 9781844576371  
Rebecca Sullivan's lucid and engaging  
study of Natalie Wood's career sheds  
new light on her enormous, albeit  
uneven, contributions to American  
cinema. This persuasive text argues  
for renewed appreciation of Natalie  
Wood by situating her enigmatic  
performances in the context of a  
transforming star industry and  
revolutionary, post-war sexual politics.  
[www.palgrave.com/  
page/bfi-publishing](http://www.palgrave.com/page/bfi-publishing)



## SPECTACULAR TELEVISION

By Helen Wheatley, I.B. Tauris; International  
Library of the Moving Image series; 288pp;  
hardback, £69, ISBN 9781780767369;  
paperback, £16.99, ISBN 9781780767376  
Television has long been regarded as  
visually inferior to cinema – sound-  
led, dull to look at and consumed by  
a distracted audience. Yet since its  
earliest days, when it was introduced  
to audiences in public promotional  
demonstrations, the medium has  
embraced spectacular content and  
been positioned as a spectacular  
'attraction'. Today, programmes  
are viewed on large HD screens  
accompanied by surround sound and  
special effects. Looking at lifestyle and  
makeover shows, costume dramas,  
televised sport, travel shows and  
ambitious natural history series, Helen  
Wheatley answers the questions:  
what is televisual pleasure, and  
how has television defined its own  
brand of spectacular aesthetics?  
[www.ibtauris.com](http://www.ibtauris.com)



## FRIGHTMARES

**A History of British Horror Cinema**  
By Ian Cooper, Auteur, 214pp, paperback,  
illustrated, £18.99, ISBN 9780993071737  
*Frightmares* is an in-depth analysis  
of the British horror film, each  
chapter anchored by studies of key  
titles covering textual analysis,  
production history and critical  
reception. The films and filmmakers  
covered range from the most  
commonly discussed – Hitchcock  
and Hammer – to the more marginal  
and obscure, such as *Horror Hospital*  
and the 'savage Seventies' films of  
Pete Walker. From *Tod Slaughter*  
to Ben Wheatley, *Frightmares* is the  
most up-to-date and authoritative  
survey available of this most unfairly  
maligned staple of British cinema.  
[www.auteur.co.uk](http://www.auteur.co.uk)



## JULIE CHRISTIE

By Melanie Bell, BFI Publishing/  
Palgrave, 160pp, paperback,  
£16.99, ISBN 9781844574476  
In this original and revealing study,  
film scholar Melanie Bell analyses  
Christie's work in key films, from  
*Doctor Zhivago* (1965) to *Don't Look Now*  
(1973), *The Gold Diggers* (1983) and  
*Away from Her* (2006), demonstrating  
how the actress developed a poetic and  
ironic performance style that enabled  
her to shift convincingly between  
mainstream and arthouse cinema.  
[www.palgrave.com/  
page/bfi-publishing](http://www.palgrave.com/page/bfi-publishing)



# Home cinema



Sharp operator: Harada Mieko as Lady Kaede

## BATTLE ROYAL

Castles burn, armies clash and Kurosawa unleashes chaos: a new 4k restoration shows off the cinematic glories of *Ran*

### RAN

Kurosawa Akira; Japan/France 1985; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 160 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: 'AK' (documentary on the making of 'Ran' by Chris Marker), 'Akira Kurosawa: The Epic and the Intimate' (interviews with producers and crew), 'The Samurai' and 'The Art of the Samurai' featurettes, interviews with translator Catherine Cadou, DP Ueda Shôji, actress Harada Mieko and film critic Michael Brooke, footage from 2015 Tokyo International Film Festival

#### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Kurosawa Akira often liked to draw on western literature for his material – Dostoevsky for *The Idiot* (1951), Gorky for *The Lower Depths* (1957), even thriller writer Ed McBain for *High and Low* (1963). This was one reason he was sometimes accused, in his native country, of making 'westernised' cinema. But above all he repeatedly returned to Shakespeare – and the

great Shakespearean tragedies in particular. *Throne of Blood* (1957) reimagines *Macbeth* as a chilling samurai drama, strongly influenced by the conventions of Noh theatre. *Hamlet* migrates into the corrupt executive world of modern Japan in *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960). And for the last great film of his career, Kurosawa chose *King Lear*, relocating it in the same key historical period as *Seven Samurai* – the tormented 16th century, when Japan was torn apart by the conflicts of rival warlords.

Lear becomes the ageing Lord Ichimonji Hidetora, who decides to abdicate power and split his realm between his three sons – since in this patriarchal society, no daughter could ever think to inherit. But even so Kurosawa gives us a lethal woman as his Goneril equivalent – Lady Kaede, wife of Hidetora's eldest son Taro and lover of his second son Jiro. Close kin to Asaji, the Lady Macbeth figure in *Throne of Blood*, Kaede manipulates her far weaker menfolk to work out her long-nurtured scheme of vengeance against the entire Ichimonji clan.

"We... are children of this age, weaned on strife and chaos," Hidetora's youngest son Saburo warns his father, vainly trying to deflect

him from his disastrous plan. 'Ran' means 'turmoil' or 'chaos', and chaos is what Kurosawa unleashes across the full expanse of his Scope screen – but meticulously orchestrated chaos, as castles burn, colour-coded armies bearing wind-ruffled banners wheel and clash, and images of death and desolation overwhelm the senses.

The film moves at a stately pace, and occasionally you may find yourself yearning for the light-footed, zip-panned action of *Yojimbo* (1961) or *Seven Samurai* (1954). But although the 74-year-old director's eyesight was starting to fail, his painterly instinct for visual composition was still unsurpassed, and his use of the Japanese landscape – from rolling wooded hills and lush meadows to the slate-grey, barren slopes of Mount Fuji – compels the eye.

As Hidetora, Nakadai Tatsuya (Mifune's nemesis in *Yojimbo* and *Sanjuro*) builds on his dual lead performance from Kurosawa's previous film *Kagemusha* (1980) – we get the ageing warlord's arrogance and stubbornness but also his fatal naivety. But this is an ensemble piece – it's not the tragedy of one old man but the catastrophe and destruction of a whole society – and the entire cast are note-perfect, not least Harada Mieko



as Lady Kaede and Ikehata Shinnosuke (a well-known transvestite who acts under the name of Pitā) as Hidetora's fool Kyoami. His tenderness towards the mad old man, tempered by bouts of exasperation, is at once funny and moving.

Vittorio Dalle Ore, only 24 at the time, acted as one of the production's several assistant directors. He landed the job through a Japanese cousin, but spoke no Japanese himself and had to learn fast. He was struck by the way everyone in the crew mucked in, with nobody standing on status. The chief electrician and the art director willingly helped with cutting grass. "The atmosphere was wonderful," he recalled, when I spoke to him in London in April. "Everyone would help everyone else, giving last touches to the sets, polishing floors and pillars, ageing the costumes for all the extras." Even the septuagenarian director himself would join in and contribute to these mundane tasks.

Kurosawa, Dalle Ore found, believed in extremely long rehearsals, over weeks or months, but then would often shoot even the most complex scenes in a single take. "It would be one take, rarely more than two, and then 'Thank you' and that was it. He'd drawn these very detailed paintings, which was his way to think about the themes and develop the characters. So he knew just what he wanted."

Kurosawa had had plenty of time to decide. *Ran* was ten years in preparation while the veteran moviemaker, spurned by the Japanese studios as too extravagant, was forced to scabble for funding. It wasn't until the maverick French producer Serge Silberman (who had supported Buñuel) came to his rescue, finding backing and chipping in some of his own money, that production could start. To some extent you can see why the studios were running scared. Kurosawa never believed in cutting corners, and *Ran* was at the time the most expensive Japanese production ever undertaken. It took two years to prepare the handmade costumes; most of the 200 horses were specially imported from the US; and the huge castle on the slopes of Mount Fuji was constructed complete and to scale before being burned to the ground as Hidetora's two elder sons attack their beleaguered father.

Of all Kurosawa's films, *Ran* is the bleakest and most pessimistic, set as it is in a world of treachery and slaughter – a world, as Saburo says, "that is barren of loyalty and feeling". His verdict is echoed at the end of the film, when both he and Hidetora lie dead, by the loyal samurai Tango (the Kent figure). "It is the gods that weep," Tango declares, when the Fool berates the seemingly callous deities. "They can't save us from ourselves... Men prefer sorrow to joy, suffering to peace." For although Kurosawa sticks largely to the plot of *King Lear*, he diverges from Shakespeare in one crucial aspect: while the play tells us little of Lear's past, in the film we learn how Hidetora gained and held on to power through the infliction of cruelty and suffering, often on the innocent, and it's these cruelties that come back, karma-like, to destroy him and his sons.

Something of Kurosawa's personal life may



Trooping the colours: Jiro (Nezu Jinpachi) leads an army to battle

have fed into the film's pessimism; while it was in preparation, his wife of 40 years, Yaguchi Yōko, contracted cancer, and she died during the shoot. The film's final image is one of utter desolation: a blind man (himself one of Hidetora's victims as a child) teetering helplessly on the edge of a precipice, the protective image of Lord Buddha falling from his hand; this, Kurosawa seems to be telling us, is the epitome of the human condition. But despite the grimness of its theme, Dalle Ore recalls that *Ran* "wasn't at all a depressing film to make. It was so intense and concentrated".

And the massive expenditure paid off spectacularly, as can be seen in this handsome 4K transfer. *Ran* never looks anything short of magnificent, and the battle scenes stir

the senses and the soul. The sound transfer makes the most of Kurosawa's meticulously detailed sound effects – banners snapping in the wind, horses' hooves thundering across the terrain, flames tearing at sundering wood, the shuffle and scuttle of phalanxes of footsoldiers manoeuvring into position, Lady Kaede's silken kimono sliding across the polished wooden floor. Takemitsu Toru's plangent score, strongly influenced – at Kurosawa's suggestion – by the symphonies of Mahler as much as by the music of Noh theatre, comes across with untrammelled emotional impact, not least in the final funeral march for Hidetora and Saburo.

Extras are generous almost to excess – over four hours of them, with Chris Marker's feature-length *AK*, his fascinated account of the making of the film, a standout. *AK* was the sole extra when the film was previously released on DVD by StudioCanal; this time it's backed up by a whole slew of interviews and informative background material to deepen our appreciation of Kurosawa's majestic late masterpiece. 

*Kurosawa Akira's 'Ran' is not the tragedy of one old man but the catastrophic destruction of a whole society*



A world of treachery and slaughter: Terao Akira as Taro, Harada Mieko as Lady Kaede



# New releases

## BLACK WIDOW

Bob Rafelson; USA 1987; Signal One Entertainment/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; 102 minutes; Certificate 15; 1.85:1; Features: interviews, commentary, stills/poster gallery, trailers

### Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Bob Rafelson's first film since his incendiary 1981 remake of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* initially seems to promise a conventional neo-noir suspense thriller, as we're introduced to two very different women: the self-perceived frump Alex (Debra Winger), a workaholic criminal investigator at the US justice department with no private life to speak of, and the slinky, self-possessed Catherine (Theresa Russell), who is either unlucky to a degree that makes her a statistical improbability or she has been calmly bumping off her various husbands, all of them conveniently wealthy and having equally conveniently recently altered their wills. But Rafelson banishes any hint of did she/didn't she from the start by showing Catherine explicitly murdering her toy-tycoon husband (a brashly Southern-accented Dennis Hopper), making it clear upfront that Alex is on to something when she joins various dots and begins active pursuit.

Which is when the film starts to become a more involving character study, especially when the two women forge a bizarrely close relationship in Hawaii. Winger has always been one of the stronger 1980s American leading women but she's unusually well matched here by Russell, who hadn't visibly relished a character to quite this extent since her star-making turn in *Bad Timing* seven years earlier. The cat-and-mouse games that Alex and Catherine play are what gives the story its fire (especially as we're never quite sure how much each knows about the other), though the film remains oddly coy about what appears to be a clear mutual attraction between them – perhaps because it might have derailed a narrative that starts to become schematic again towards the end?

No matter: there's still plenty to enjoy here, not least brief but indelible supporting turns from Nicol Williamson, Sami Frey, Diane Ladd and David Mamet, with added cult cachet via Mary Woronov's no-nonsense diving instructor – although it's James Hong's unstable private investigator who waltzes off with every scene he's in.

**Disc:** Conrad Hall's cinematography scrubs up very nicely in high definition. Extras include interviews with writer Ronald Bass and assistant cameraman Conrad W. Hall (son of the late cinematographer).

## BRITISH 'TEENAGER' FILMS

### BEAT GIRL

Edmond T. Gréville; UK 1959; BFI Flipside/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 87 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: alternative versions, Gillian Hills interview, short films, booklet

### EXPRESSO BONGO

Val Guest; UK 1959; BFI Flipside/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 111 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: 1962 recut version with commentary by Val Guest and Yolande Donlan (Blu-ray only), gallery, trailer, press books, shorts

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

The emergence of the teenager as social phenomenon and market demographic in the latter half of the 1950s left British cinema unsure

how to respond but certain there was money in it. Two new 2k restorations from the happily revived BFI Flipside label illustrate contrasting responses to this epoch-changing youthquake.

*Beat Girl* evidently has one eye on US product such as *Rebel Without a Cause*, offering a largely studio-set, mock-ethnographic survey of the new teenage tribe frequenting Soho coffee bars and basement clubs, playing chicken on country roads and talking in a brand new argot ("Straight from the fridge, dad!"), which screenwriter Dail Ambler quite possibly made up for the occasion. It's a film as flummoxed as super-square patriarch David Farrar's permanently creased brow, which perhaps explains why the producers hedged their bets by situating a striptease show across the street from the kids' espresso stop, allowing extensive onstage footage to be tailored for various export versions.

Complicating matters further is the presence of then 14-year-old Gillian Hills as the upstart daughter of architect Farrar, who plays up even more when he brings home new peroxide-poppet French wife Noëlle Adam. With the dialogue pretty hazy on just how young Hills's character really is, the narrative trajectory drawing her towards the said strip joint is pretty clummy stuff, not least when exquisitely sleazy proprietor Christopher Lee lays hands on her.

Remarkably, though, Hills herself transcends such icky teenploitation calculations, delivering a performance whose fierce petulance, button-pushing poutery and quivering carnal uncertainty suggest an adolescent emotional ferment far more authentic than anything else in this speculative celluloid tat. Taken together with Adam Faith's obviously-not-bothered turn as a wannabe rocker, it makes the film an unwitting context for a fresh portrayal of young folk as their own complex, independent selves. Like so much British cinema of the time, it's a muddled yet fascinating affair, which somehow manages to look to the future in spite of itself.

By contrast, *Expresso Bongo* isn't all that interested in teenagers *per se*, but turns in a sharply satirical account of the showbiz sharks eager to tap the new source of disposable income they represent. Based on a successful stage musical, the film is in outline a traditional backstage saga, with wisecracking agent Laurence Harvey scheming to break his latest discovery. But the ingrained scepticism in Wolf Mankowitz's caustic dialogue delivers a story in which absolutely everyone is grafting and



Café society: *Beat Girl*

British fair play is in seriously short supply. This makes it rather less time-locked than many musical offerings of its era, though the presence of a teenage Cliff Richard as Harvey's youthful crooner Bongo Herbert actually worked against the film in the longer term, since previous DVD releases have only featured the 1962 reissue, which sliced out everyone else's songs to give more prominence to Cliff.

Here, at last, the original release print is restored, featuring a standout number for Harvey as he nimbly picks his way along Old Compton Street – just one instance of the cherishable vintage location work featured throughout.

**Disc:** Newly minted 2k restorations, with the widescreen *Expresso Bongo* looking particularly swish. Some intriguing extras on both issues, but Gillian Hills's new 25-minute interview on the *Beat Girl* release offers rather more gossip and insight than the amiable if understandably foggy commentary from the 93-year-old Guest, recorded just a year before his death in 2006.

## FILMS STARRING MARION DAVIES

### NOT SO DUMB

King Vidor; USA 1930; Warner Archive/Region 1 DVD NTSC; 76 minutes; 4:3

### THE FLORADORA GIRL

Harry Beaumont; USA 1930; Warner Archive/Region 1 DVD NTSC; 76 minutes; 4:3

### PEG O' MY HEART

Robert Z. Leonard; USA 1933; Warner Archive/Region 1 DVD NTSC; 87 minutes; 4:3

### Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Marion Davies has the curious distinction of having been a Golden Age leading lady for nearly 20 solid years but remaining a legend instead for her public role as William Randolph Hearst's devoted mistress and Trilby, and therefore as *Citizen Kane*'s Second Mrs Kane. Because of *Kane*'s deathlessness, many a defender has had cause to proclaim the unfairness of that portrayal, but though even Welles subsequently proclaimed Davies's talents as a comedienne, precious few of her films have been around to make the case.

These three romcoms offer a thorough work-up on what the Marion Davies Experience was like – a kind of early-30s scramble of Loretta Young and Joan Blondell, with plenty of bright-eyed innocence, corn-fed sincerity, bushy-tailed vim and comic confidence. Whether she would have been a headliner without Hearst and his Cosmopolitan Pictures paying her way is impossible to say (just as we can't figure out the unboosted careers of, say, Ann Harding and Rose Hobart), but Davies did have redoubtable energy and charm.

King Vidor's *Not So Dumb* is a prototypical early talkie play-to-film, hewing close to the George S. Kaufman/Marc Connelly bubbleheaded farce *Dulcy*, in which Davies is a babbling nitwit fiancée to a young entrepreneur looking to impress a grumpy investor during a country-house weekend. Davies is the goofy glue, but the script provides opportunities for Franklin Pangborn, Raymond Hackett and Donald Ogden Stewart (in his only significant role) to steal the thing right away from her.

*The Floradora Girl* is another kind of conventional spree – Davies is a dancer





## PSYCHO KILLER

Odd goings-on, an old dark house and a touch of Norman Bates... José Ramón Larraz's film builds chills among the horror tropes

## SYMPTOMS

José Ramón Larraz; UK 1974; BFI Flipside/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 15; 92 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: 'On Vampyres and Other Symptoms', interviews, original theatrical trailer, booklet

**Reviewed by Kim Newman**

Though usually compared to Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965) – from which it borrows some hallucinatory presences, a stabbing or two and a finale in which nosey parkers poke around the site of an outbreak of psychotic female violence – this 1974 entry in the art-cum-exploitation subgenre of lady-going-crazy pictures made in Britain by foreign directors (cf Joseph Losey's *Secret Ceremony*, Lucio Fulci's *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin*) has a country-house setting and an autumnal atmosphere more akin to Robert Altman's similarly themed, Irish-shot *Images* (with Susannah York, 1972). Nevertheless, this venture into Cannes Film Festival-bid artiness from Spanish-born exploitation writer-director José Ramón Larraz has quietly disturbing rewards for those willing to get past its slow pacing, plentiful wandering-about sequences and many narrative loose ends.

Helen Ramsey (Angela Pleasence), a neurotic who lives in an isolated and decaying old house, is hung up on her departed friend (and probable lover) Cora (Marie-Paule Mailleux), whose picture is prominently displayed in the living room. Her mood brightens with the arrival of Anne (Lorna Heilbron), who is fleeing from oppressive boyfriend John (Ronald O'Neil). Anne is drawn into a flirtation with the smitten, clingy Helen. With her mannish haircut, Anne comes across more as a 1974 lesbian stereotype than either of the other women – though when John turns up it becomes apparent that she has consciously or unconsciously made herself look like him (down to wearing the same heavy glasses). Anne quietly digs into Cora's disappearance and wonders why Helen lets Brady (Peter Vaughan), a gamekeeper she finds disgusting, live in the stables.

A mid-film stabbing in the attic evokes *Psycho* (1960), with its sudden shift of viewpoint, rather than *Repulsion*, and the mousy, maniacal Helen has a Norman Bates-like predilection for dressing up and making over as the corpses pile up. It may be Larraz's strange ideas about English country life, or a hold-over from his more nakedly exploitative earlier films (*Whirlpool*, *Deviation*, *Scream... and Die!*), but supporting characters act very oddly – the charlady (Nancy Nevinson) and a paternal chemist (Raymond Huntley) are refreshingly accepting of Helen's sexuality, while the brutish Brady's first response to fishing a nude corpse out of the lake is to carry it home and ponder who to blackmail about it.



Mirror image: Spanish-born exploitation writer-director José Ramón Larraz's *Symptoms*

The main attraction is a fragile, waif-like study in neurosis from Pleasence as the withdrawn girl who drifts through the cluttered old dark house like a ghost, occasionally solving relationship problems by taking knives to her friends and acquaintances. An infrequent film performer (she partnered her father Donald in 1974's *From Beyond the Grave*), Pleasence is one of those interesting British actresses (Anna Massey, Kathleen Byron) who tended to get stuck with mad spinster roles. Here, Helen's mixed messages are emphasised by lighting and makeup that make Pleasence look alarmingly like her father in a wig (another Polanski nod, to *Cul-de-sac*) but also oddly alluring. Larraz surrounds her performance with a murky melodramatic plot that has something to do with Cora's real or imagined betrayal with Brady (as in *Vampyres*, made the same year, he worms out of actually explaining precisely what's been going on).

Given the linking of lesbianism with homicidal mania in *Symptoms*, *Vampyres* and (in his lowest mode) 1978's *The Violation of the Bitch*, it seems likely that Larraz wasn't gifted with any special insight into psychological extremes. *Symptoms* at least offers real actresses as characters who might

*Helen wanders through the old house like a ghost, solving relationship problems by taking knives to her acquaintances*

be human beings rather than the laughable girlie-mag refugees of his later films. Vaughan, reprising his macho rural-thug handyman act from *Fanatic* (1965), provides glowering menace, and Heilbron, best remembered for *The Creeping Flesh* (1973), is smart as Helen's apparently more connected friend. Aside from a couple of slashings, seen from a bloodied, subjective viewpoint, not much happens, but Larraz's camera glides over the eerie lake and prowls through the rambling house to rev up the atmosphere until the climactic thunderstorm flashes and rattles Helen into a somnambulist state.

The BFI Flipside DVD/Blu-ray set includes illuminating new interviews with Pleasence, Heilbron and editor Brian Smedley-Aston; Celia Novis's slightly overstretched documentary *On Vampyres and Other Symptoms* (2011), which focuses on Larraz's appearance at a film festival (whose organisers surprise him with a reunion of his *Vampyres* stars – nearly scuppered because the director can't face sitting through the film again) but also includes reminiscences about much of his career; and an episode of *Eurotika!* on the filmmaker. Regarding *Symptoms*, Larraz takes care to credit Belgian short-story writer Thomas Owen – an underrated and important master of modern gothic – as an inspiration, but oddly fails to mention his co-screenwriter Stanley Miller, whose perhaps pertinent CV includes adaptations of J. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas* and 'Carmilla' for TV's *Mystery and Imagination* series and episodes of *Out of the Unknown* and *Sherlock Holmes*. **S**



## Revival

## GROWING PAINS

Edward Yang's teens-in-tumult drama takes place against the backdrop of a country that is itself in the throes of adolescence

## A BRIGHTER SUMMER DAY

Edward Yang; Taiwan 1991; Criterion Collection/Region A/1 DVD/Blu-ray; 236 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: new audio commentary by Tony Rayns, new interview with Chang Chen, 'Our Time, Our Story' (documentary about the New Taiwan Cinema), videotaped 1992 performance of Yang's play 'Likely Consequence', essay by critic Godfrey Cheshire, Yang's 1991 director's statement

## Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Edward Yang's *A Brighter Summer Day* is a portrait of life among the first generation of expatriated mainland Chinese to grow up on the island of Taiwan – a generation to which Yang, born in Shanghai in 1947 but raised almost entirely in Taipei, belonged.

Set in 1960-61, it is a film about turbulent adolescence as experienced in a nation in adolescence. The film's young men and women, while theoretically growing up under the legitimate government of China, piece together their identities in a manner that reflects the cultural crosscurrents passing through the former Formosa: at concerts they sing translated Elvis lyrics, from which the film's title derives; they bring to their gang rumble the *katana* swords left behind by the fleeing Japanese at the end of World War II; and when Honey, the almost legendary absentee leader of the local Little Park Gang, re-emerges from hiding, he professes himself to be an ardent admirer of *War and Peace*.

The reference to Tolstoy's epic gives some idea of the scope of Yang's ambition in *A Brighter Summer Day*. His fourth feature was three years in the making, runs nearly four hours and contains, per Godfrey Cheshire's liner notes for this new release, more than a hundred speaking parts. It has a protagonist of sorts in the person of Si'r (Chang Chen), a lanky teenager who, as the film begins, is being sent to a not particularly prestigious night school because of academic underperformance. But it also makes room for digressive subplots – the interrogation of Si'r's father by Kuomintang authorities, backstage drama at the movie studio adjacent to the school, the escalation of violence between older gang members – that might have been the centrepieces of three normal-sized features.

Rather than the vast panorama of the Napoleonic Wars, the historical backdrop to *A Brighter Summer Day* is a humble and sordid true-crime case: the murder of a 14-year-old Taipei girl by a classmate in June 1961. The killing only arrives towards the close of the film, however, after Yang has illustrated the entire social context surrounding this sad, solitary, spontaneous act of violence.

We are presented with a cultural upheaval that the old order is helpless to deal with – a



Brighter young things: Lisa Yang, Chang Chen

'Confucian confusion', to borrow the title of Yang's next feature – where people young and old cast about for any source of security in a world built on shifting sands. Some young people, such as Si'r's sister, turn to the Church, others to gang loyalty, others to the new jukebox religion of a perfect, pure and everlasting love, which of course doesn't exist. In the adult world, meanwhile, we see everywhere the business-as-usual of corruption and cronyism and 'you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours'. In such a society, it isn't surprising that one young man should go off the deep end (and in fact the movie would make an interesting double bill with Jerzy Skolimowski's ticking testosterone time bomb from 1970 *Deep End*). What's surprising is that everyone doesn't.

I can't say if Yang was familiar with Skolimowski, but the opening of *A Brighter Summer Day*, in which Si'r and his pint-sized best friend Cat (Wong Chi-zan) eavesdrop on a film shoot at the studio, shows that

*We see corruption and cronyism everywhere... In such a society, it isn't surprising that one young man should go off the deep end*



Wong Chi-zan as pint-sized Elvis enthusiast Cat in *A Brighter Summer Day*

he knows his *Citizen Kane* and *Peeping Tom*, while some of the finely calibrated visual gags and use of offscreen space and sound cues suggest an acquaintance with Tati.

All of this is filtered through a style very much Yang's own, which combines compositional rigour with a seemingly offhand storytelling style, casually swapping the focus of the narrative between one character and another. While Yang would flexibly adapt his approach to the needs of the film at hand, here he is working in the long master-shot mode familiar from *Taipei Story* (1985) and *Yi Yi* (2000), placing figures squarely within their environments – though not consequently forestalling emotional involvement, as I've generally found the films of Yang's sometime collaborator and countryman Hou Hsiao-hsien do. (The movie's largely nocturnal settings favour a vague melancholy, and certain sequences, such as two night-time rendezvous on a local tennis court, are painfully poignant.) Yang is also perfectly willing at times to frustrate viewer involvement, as in a sword-swinging *mêlée* half-seen in the beam of a flashlight, a maelstrom of wasted motion.

*A Brighter Summer Day* has long been more spoken of than seen. In New York, I was recently able to watch the new DCP projected shortly after viewing a programme of films by Jean Eustache – another gone-before-his-time artist whose legacy has been largely held hostage by the recalcitrance of surviving rights holders. (I might rant about distributors withholding perfectly lovely 35mm prints in favour of their bright, shiny new DCPs, but that's probably a subject for another time.) Martin Scorsese's World Cinema Foundation, which handled the restoration of the film, and Criterion, which previously released *Yi Yi*, have done the Lord's work in making Yang's opus available on Blu-ray, but until *Taipei Story* and *The Terrorizers* (1986) are more widely available, the general understanding of New Taiwan Cinema will still be fumbling in the dark. ☹



# New releases

in the famous *fin de siècle* revue, taking lessons in man-trapping (“Diamonds as big as horseflies!”) and getting involved with a spoiled rich boy (Lawrence Gray) for whom bringing a chorine home to the mansion is a crisis. Melodrama ensues, period details abound (note the packed parking lot of horse carriages) and a late two-strip Technicolor sequence ages to a gritty pink.

Robert Z. Leonard’s *Peg o’ My Heart*, coming three years later, is a far smoother, cleverly scripted and more adorable affair, and Davies glows as a clueless but smartassed Irish girl forced by an inheritance to adapt to British manor life. One glimpse of Davies and her terrier skipping rope in unison is enough to make a fan for life.

Hearst wanted her to be dignified, but in all three films Davies indulges in her own dance-hall routines, standing on tables and boisterously leading a crowd in song.

**Disc:** Standard archive-print transfers, with the two older films subject to occasional fuzziness and fading.

## EUREKA

Nicolas Roeg; USA 1983; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format;

Certificate 18; 130 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: audio interview with Nicolas Roeg; interviews with producer Jeremy Thomas, writer Paul Mayersberg and editor Tony Lawson, music and effects track, trailer, booklet

### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

“The timing was bad,” wrote Nicolas Roeg of *Eureka* in his idiosyncratic sort-of-autobiography *The World Is Ever Changing*. “It was completely out of tune with the times and people were confused by it.” Producer Jeremy Thomas, in the interview included with this release, attributes the film’s failure partly to studio politics – associated with disgraced MGM producer David Begelman, it was given a brief, grudging release for contractual reasons – and partly to the fact that the lead character, gold prospector turned multimillionaire Jack McCann (Gene Hackman), repelled audiences by being “quite dislikeable in almost every way... no redeeming features”.

All true enough, perhaps – but *Eureka* is also, it has to be said, a frustratingly uneven movie, a fractured blend of the exceptional and the howlingly off-key. Derived from a real-life *cause célèbre*, the murder of former goldminer Sir Harry Oakes in Nassau in 1943, it’s a meditation on the futility of riches and the emptiness of achieving one’s life’s ambition.

McCann, in Hackman’s admirably uningratiating performance, seems to have only one attachment, near-incestuous in its intensity, to his daughter Tracy (Theresa Russell), and when he loses her to playboy Claude Maillot Van Horn (Rutger Hauer), it’s as if he’s willed his own death.

Along with Hackman, Russell and Hauer are ideal for their roles, but elsewhere there’s some bizarre cross-casting: Joe Pesci as a Jewish gangster, Mickey Rourke as his Italian *consigliere*. And the film falls seriously apart in its final third: a murder-trial sequence that goes on way too long and features some excruciatingly wrong-note dialogue. Redeeming all of this



Lee meets *Lysistrata*: Angela Bassett and John Cusack in *Chi-Raq*

are Roeg’s visuals, especially in the Canadian sequences: a sublimely elemental mix of fire and ice, gloriously scored to Wagner.

**Disc:** Impeccably restored in both sound and visuals, the film comes up as new. Roeg’s audio-only interview from the NFT covers his whole career up to *Eureka*, running over the first 100 minutes of the film as backdrop.

## HORSE MONEY

Pedro Costa; Portugal 2014; Second Run/Region-free Blu-ray and DVD; Certificate 12; 105 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: short film (“O nosso homem”), interview (Pedro Costa, Laura Mulvey), introduction (Thom Andersen), trailers, booklet

### Reviewed by Michael Brooke

The latest instalment in Pedro Costa’s two-decade chronicling of the inhabitants of Lisbon’s now-demolished Fontaínhas slums (after *Ossos*, *In Vanda’s Room*, *Colossal Youth* and various shorts) is painted on a broader canvas than before, though not in the geographical sense. Instead, time is compressed so that the film appears to be set in a perpetual present in which the entire history of Fontaínhas’s Cape Verdean immigrant community has been telescoped to the point where it’s impossible to tell the difference between flesh-and-blood humans, ghosts and living statues.

His hand trembling, the central figure Ventura (familiar from other Fontaínhas films) wanders physically through the crepuscular corridors of abandoned buildings (some more derelict than others) and mentally through his past, trying to establish the point (and nature) of his existence and his relationship to Portuguese history dating back to the slave trade, with particular reference to the 1974 ‘Carnation Revolution’ in which he seems to have participated in his late teens.

Watched without preparation or footnotes (thankfully, this release comes with plenty), *Horse Money* may be borderline incomprehensible at first – it’s certainly the hardest of Costa’s Fontaínhas films to grasp straight away, and Jonathan Romney’s booklet essay cheerfully

acknowledges that “every review of this film is guaranteed to get at least one detail wrong”. But in compensation, the imagery is arrestingly powerful throughout, with Costa and co-cinematographer Leonardo Simões pushing high-definition digital technology to its limits when it comes to recording dark-skinned faces against even darker backgrounds (with occasional brilliant splashes of symbolic red), as if to suggest the bowels of the slave ships on which Ventura’s real-life ancestors first reached Europe. After which, they and their descendants were treated no better – a litany of workplace accidents was presumably drawn from actual records.

**Disc:** Second Run’s first Blu-ray release shows off the chiaroscuro images to the best possible advantage, although the decision to retain the original 25fps frame rate has produced a disc that may not be compatible with non-European equipment (Cinema Guild is releasing it in the US). The extras offer a more generous package than is usual for this label, the highlight being Laura Mulvey’s 41-minute interview with Costa. The short *O nosso homem* was also included on Eureka’s *Colossal Youth* DVD, but is just as on-topic here, and it gets a welcome high-definition upgrade.

## THREE FILMS BY SPIKE LEE

### RED HOOK SUMMER

USA 2012; Image Entertainment/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 120 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: Spike Lee commentary, music video, behind-the-scenes documentary, teaser trailer

### DA SWEET BLOOD OF JESUS

USA 2014; Anchor Bay Entertainment/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 124 minutes; 2.35:1

### CHI-RAQ

USA 2015; Lionsgate/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 127 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: music video, deleted/extended scenes, making-of documentary

### Reviewed by Brad Stevens

British cinemagoers will inevitably have a skewed view of Spike Lee’s progress during the past decade, with only



# Television

## NATURE BOY

Joe Wright; UK 2000; BBC/Simply Media/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 240 minutes; 16:9

**Reviewed by Robert Hanks**

Bryan Elsley's drama is a heady blend of genres: Salinger-esque adolescent confusion, Ken Loach 'grim up north' social realism (a debt to *Kes* is made explicit in a scene in which a parrot is murdered and thrown in a bin), corporate conspiracy and eco-mysticism. A lot of the individual elements don't work: the crudely drawn lumpenproletariat of the opening episode; the pompous, emotionally constrained MP in the second; the abrupt transition to an ecowarrior protest in the third; the proliferation of tasteful boob-shots of women looking pained while having sex with unsuitable men; the grating indie-folkish soundtrack (Beth Orton, Paul Weller). It feels, too, as though issues (a brush with paedophilia) are jammed in, characters are written to fit agendas: the sense of contrivance detracts from the drama's driving concern – what are we doing to the land, the air, the water and our children?

Lee Ingleby, fresh out of drama school, is excellent in the lead (I see him in other things – he's best-known as Sgt Bacchus in *Inspector George Gently* – and grind my teeth that he isn't given more to do). He projects a believable innocence and gawky, inarticulate charisma that holds the viewer's attention even when the plot is wandering off with the pixies. His character, David, is a misfit teenager in a small northern coastal town who finds refuge in the local bird sanctuary from the vicious anarchy of school and the broken domesticity of his foster home. When things go badly wrong, he sets off in search of his long-departed father (Paul McGann, not quite carrying off a quasi-prophetic role) and ends up on an odyssey around England, charming children and animals, falling in love with Joanne Froggatt's elfin eco-campaigner and encountering adult duplicity on every hand.

Though he can't impose coherence on the material, Joe Wright, working up to his move to the big screen with *Pride & Prejudice* (2005) and *Atonement* (2007), produces some images of serene beauty that complement the overwrought tone. It's an awkward pleasure.

**Disc:** Good transfer.

## A PICTURE OF KATHERINE MANSFIELD

Alan Cooke; UK 1973; Simply Media/Region 2 DVD; 307 minutes; 4:3

**Reviewed by Dan Callahan**

Fans of both Vanessa Redgrave and writer Katherine Mansfield have pined for this early-70s six-hour TV miniseries for so long that it was beginning to seem likely we'd never get a chance to look at it again. This bare-bones DVD release of the show from Simply Media counts, then, as a real surprise.

The series throws you into Mansfield's life and work in a way that feels by turns intimate and awkward. Over six episodes, Redgrave acts in scenes from the writer's life, told in retrospect by her husband John Middleton Murry (Jeremy Brett), though most of the series is taken up by dramatisations of her stories. Redgrave and



**Trapped** It is pervaded with a sense of the weirdness of Icelandic society, forced by its smallness to be both incestuous and perpetually outward-looking

Brett act in only one of these, 'Psychology', in which Redgrave seems to be mimicking Eleanor Bron in Ken Russell's *Women in Love* (1969).

Redgrave and Brett have real chemistry, particularly in the electric scene in which Mansfield and Murry meet for the first time and each looks at the other as if at a life raft in the middle of a stormy sea. But the scenes with D.H. Lawrence (Michael Williams), the man who was Mansfield's natural enemy, have a distracted quality, not helped by the fact that they seem to take place in a barely decorated gymnasium.

As the episodes go on, the recreated Mansfield stories start to dominate and crowd out the Redgrave-Brett scenes. Some of them, such as 'Something Childish But Very Natural', are beautifully done and bring out the Tennessee Williams-like poetic lyricism of Mansfield's writing. But the later stories start to feel too similar, and Redgrave loses the thread of her character once Mansfield becomes neurotic and demanding as her health breaks down. Explosions of ill temper are not Redgrave's forte, and you are finally left wondering if Mansfield was more a part for Glenda Jackson than for Redgrave.

**Disc:** The image is poor throughout, but for such a rare title this is to be expected.

## TRAPPED

Iceland 2015; Arrow Films/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 520 minutes; 16:9; Features: 'The Making of Trapped'

**Reviewed by Robert Hanks**

The original title of this late Icelandic entry in

the Nordic *noir* catalogue, translates literally as 'Impassable' – it's what is written on a sign placed by a snow-covered road. But *Trapped* gets the spirit: it's a drama of isolation, about life and, naturally, death in a small port where everyone knows everyone else, and may well have been married to them at some point – an openness that just drives the secrets deeper.

The series was created by Baltasar Kormákur, director of *101 Reykjavik* (2000), the marine survival drama *The Deep* (2012) – and, not irrelevantly, a couple of Mark Wahlberg vehicles: this is clearly a conscious effort by Icelandic TV to break the international market, in which respect it has succeeded brilliantly. Olafur Darri Olafsson – who was typecast in *The Deep* as a fisherman who can function in Arctic waters because of his abnormal seal-like layers of fat – is appealingly bearlike and angst-ridden as the local police chief coping with a broken marriage, a headless, limbless torso, sex trafficking, smug Danes and local corruption as winter storms close in, cutting the town off.

Plotwise, it's full of elements that feel either familiar or reflexively topical (Chinese investment, people smuggling, the shadows of an old murder). But the atmosphere is established well – frontier-crossing technical slickness balanced with growing anxiety, and pervaded with a sense of the weirdness of Icelandic society, forced by its smallness to be both incestuous and perpetually outward-looking.

**Disc:** The almost terminally muted palette of winter colours looks gorgeous on Blu-ray. Ⓔ



# New releases

his 'entertainments' (in the Graham Greene sense) *Inside Man* and *Oldboy* receiving theatrical distribution. Lee's sublime *Miracle at St Anna* (2008) went straight to DVD in the UK, while the three films under review have not been seen here in any form. Yet they are clearly the work of a director who, far from selling out, has found a way to keep creating the kind of risky, cutting-edge cinema on which his reputation is based.

*Red Hook Summer* initially feels relatively conventional, telling a familiar story about a teenager, Flik (Jules Brown), spending the summer with his grandfather, Bishop Enoch (Clarke Peters), in Brooklyn's Red Hook neighbourhood. Yet Lee's treatment of Enoch's sermons in the Lil' Peace of Heaven Baptist Church, as spectacles unrelated to any obvious narrative or thematic point, pushes the film into far more interesting territory, and a surprise revelation casts everything we have seen in a new light, suggesting that viewpoints hitherto positioned as untenable might have some validity (a reminder of how much Lee has in common with Otto Preminger).

Although *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus* appears to be a direct sequel to *Red Hook Summer*, introducing anthropologist-turned-vampire Dr Hess Greene (Stephen Tyrone Williams) as a member of Lil' Peace of Heaven's congregation, it is actually a remake of Bill Gunn's remarkable *Ganja & Hess* (1973). *Ganja* might have provided a stylistic model for *Red Hook Summer*'s church scenes, but *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus* seems to have been primarily inspired by Gunn's screenplay rather than the film made from it, whose quirkily unpredictable improvisations have no equivalent here. Lee is so devoted to his source text that he even includes passages of dialogue Gunn left on the cutting-room floor, though they were restored to *Ganja* when it was reworked by other hands into a version retitled *Double Possession* (or *Blood Couple*).

Lee's remake thus has more in common with that disowned re-edit than it does with Gunn's preferred cut, rendering this homage somewhat problematic. The widescreen imagery is certainly striking, and the project was evidently an extremely personal one, though the lesbian overtones Lee has added are marked by his usual ambivalent attitude towards homosexuality.

Whereas *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus* was funded through Kickstarter, *Chi-Raq*, the most impressive of these three films, was financed by Amazon. Far from being compromised, this is an audaciously Brechtian rereading of *Lysistrata*, the Aristophanes play in which Greece's women withhold sex until their husbands end the Peloponnesian War. Lee transposes this narrative to modern-day Chicago's gang culture, and though little of Aristophanes survives the journey, Lee's screenplay, much of which is in rhyming couplets, wittily name-checks other figures from Greek mythology, including Demetrius, Oedipus and Cyclops (a one-eyed Wesley Snipes). This breathlessly energetic film conveys a powerful sense of anger at the waste of black lives, and deserves to be better known.

**Disc:** All three of these titles are available on DVD and Blu-ray. The transfers look



Blank canvas: *A Poem Is a Naked Person*

fine, and although *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus* is bare-bones, the two other discs include making-of documentaries, with *Red Hook Summer* adding a commentary track and *Chi-Raq* several deleted scenes.

## THE NINTH CONFIGURATION

William Peter Blatty; USA 1980; Second Sight/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD: 118/113 minutes; Certificate 15; 2.35:1; Features: audio commentary by Blatty, interviews, Mark Kermode introduction, deleted and alternate scenes

**Reviewed by Kim Newman**

In a memoir, author William Peter Blatty made fun of the way publishers repackaged his comic novel *Twinkle, Twinkle, Killer Kane* as horror after his breakthrough with *The Exorcist*. When he came to direct this film version, he also found himself trapped between genres – and struggling to fit in an essay about spirituality and the nature of good and evil.

The setting – a fogbound European castle transplanted to California woods as a retreat for psychologically damaged (or shamming) army officers – and shooting style suggest a horror film, while the non-stop wisecracking, old-movie-dialogue quotes and laboured eccentricity feel like a stab at the military absurdist drop-out comedy of *MASH* or *Catch-22*. It's weird and disorientating, with Stacy Keach in a different acting register from the supporting cast as intense, interior-directed military psychiatrist Colonel Kane, who tries to convince wacky, cynical astronaut Cutshaw (Scott Wilson) of the existence of divinity and mercy.

Craggy character actors (Jason Miller, Ed Flanders, Moses Gunn, Neville Brand) shuffle in the background doing ridiculous things (directing a Shakespeare play cast with dogs, dressing up as Superman), but the film only really comes into focus in a long, harrowing barroom scene. Demonic, sexually ambiguous bikers – scarily incarnated by Richard Lynch and Steve Sandor – terrorise Cutshaw and Kane until the latter reveals an alternative personality that melds Christ on the Cross and Rambo on a rampage. This startling set piece redeems an otherwise erratic, inconsistent film that too often defaults to maundering philosophy studded with one-liners.

**Disc:** The interviews, commentary track and 20 minutes of deleted or alternative scenes heighten appreciation of the film's strengths – but also throw its weaknesses into sharp relief, especially as Blatty (as with *The Exorcist*) still seems to want to put in extra dialogue to explain his points.

## PIECES

Juan Piquer Simón; USA/Spain/Puerto Rico 1982; Grindhouse Releasing/All-region Blu-ray: 83/86 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: English-dubbed US theatrical release, director's cut, audio commentary by Jack Taylor, 5.1 audio option 'The Vine Theater Experience', interviews with Simón and Paul L. Smith, '42nd Street Memories', liner notes by Chas Balun and Rick Sullivan, original soundtrack album

**Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton**

In truth, discussion of Juan Piquer Simón's *Pieces* might be more appropriately placed in this magazine's 'Endings...' feature, for the Spanish director's no-redeeming-social-value slasher concludes with the genre's most startling instance of climactic genital trauma outside the very different *Sleepaway Camp* kicker.

A killer has been running amok on the campus of an unnamed university in Boston, taking an enormous, unwieldy, noisy chainsaw to nubile female students and then fleetly scampering off with bits of their bodies before the authorities arrive on the scene. The overtaxed police (Christopher George and Frank Braña) call on the assistance of ex-women's tennis champ Mary Riggs (Linda Day) and Kendall (Ian Sera), a campus Casanova who doesn't seem too bent out of shape about the fact that he'd been sleeping with many of the deceased, in some cases mere hours before their slaughter. Suspicion falls on the hirsute groundsman with a permanently arched eyebrow (Paul Smith, the Bluto of Robert Altman's *Popeye*) and an anatomy professor (Jack Taylor) who seems not to have taken the coat hanger out of his hideous blazer. The actual culprit will, however, be evident to anyone who knows the most basic mystery-novel techniques of misdirecting attention, if not to the investigators.

After we witness the butchery of much female flesh, frightfully bad tennis, a caricatured Chinese 'kung fu professor' and a flagrant disregard for continuity, the murderer is finally unmasked, his Frankenstein pet project unveiled, and Kendall is handed his comeuppance three times filled and running over, his gonads squashed by what is presumably an embittered ex reaching from beyond the grave.

In an age that admires the calculated straight camp of Asylum Studios, this bounty of authentic fumbling naivety is to be greatly prized.

**Disc:** You cannot imagine my boyish delight on discovering the scale replica of the film's dramatically crucial cheesecake jigsaw puzzle inside Grindhouse Releasing's lavish package, or my ecstasy at finding that the interview with Simón was staged in a movie theatre otherwise populated by an anatomy-class skeleton. Spotless transfer, too!

## A POEM IS A NAKED PERSON

Les Blank; USA 1974; Criterion Collection/Region 1/A DVD/Blu-ray: 90 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: new conversation between restoration supervisor Harrod Blank and Leon Russell, excerpts from 2013 Q&A with Blank, 'A Film's Forty-Year Journey: The Making of A Poem Is a Naked Person', trailers, booklet essay by Kent Jones

**Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton**

Leon Russell wouldn't get off stage when playing shitfaced emcee in the concert movie *Willie Nelson's 4th of July Celebration* (1979), so it's somewhat appropriate



# New releases

that he is relegated to the role of featured player in the ensemble cast of the film that he himself commissioned: Les Blank's long-lost *A Poem Is a Naked Person*.

Between 1972 and 1974, Blank filmed Russell and his musicians on stage, backstage, in their hotel rooms, at Russell's recording compound on Oklahoma's Grand Lake and at the Bradley's Barn studios in Nashville, where Russell, constantly sweeping his prematurely grey cowl of warlock hair out of his eyes, jams and jaws with squarehead session men. Blank also shot the Bliss Hotel in downtown Tulsa being demolished; a python making a meal of a baby chick over the snake's owner's self-amused prattle about consumer capitalism; a parachute jumper swigging a beer and then chowing down on the glass; painter Jim Franklin turning Russell's swimming pool into a psychedelic undersea wonderland; opening act/piano man Reverend Patrick Henderson tending to his flock; and the whole crazy-woman's-quilt of characters in Russell's orbit.

When not rolling the camera, Blank was editing his shorts *Hot Pepper* and *Dry Wood* (both available in Criterion's *Always for Pleasure* box-set), and there is some overlap in the work of the period – the ravishing Lake Charles rhapsody accompanying Clifton Chenier's 'I'm Comin' Home' in the former movie has its equivalent here in the matching of Russell's rendition of 'I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry' to clouds scudding across the moon. The result is a document of the intersection of Southern eccentricity and counterculture freakdom worthy to stand alongside William Eggleston's *Stranded in Canton* (1973/2005), and a crucial addition to Blank's corpus, a body of work that constitutes one of the great affirmations in American movies, a wild, whooping 'Yes!' **Disc:** As Kent Jones's insightful-as-ever liners have it, Blank is the great colourist of American documentary filmmaking, and his palette has been lovingly looked after here by son Harrod, whose travails in bringing the film to a wider public are extensively detailed.

## SPEEDY

Ted Wilde; USA 1928; Criterion Collection/Region B Blu-ray; 86 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: commentary, featurettes, essay, archive footage, short film

### Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

Harold Lloyd's final silent feature and one of his very best, *Speedy* pins a series of delectable visual jokes to a charming if slender plot. The scene is New York, with all the bustle of 1920s Manhattan in Midtown, but elsewhere, in "an old-fashioned corner of the city", pre-war values – and street plans – prevail. Lloyd is Speedy, a baseball fanatic in love with a girl called Jane (Ann Christy), whose father Pop (Bert Woodruff) drives the last horse-drawn car in the city, through those higgledy-piggledy streets. The suits who plan to flatten the district and build a railroad want to buy Pop out, or shut him down. Speedy intends to raise the price and save the day, thereby earning him and Jane enough money for a wedding and a family home.

All of which entails a bewildering spin through New York punctuated by great gags – from the

couple's dizzy day trip to Coney Island through to a climactic chase through the city with Lloyd barely controlling the horse car. In fact, the car did crash and lose a wheel – a setback Lloyd hastily mined for another joke, with a manhole cover replacing the missing part. Standout moments include a street brawl between a gang of hired heavies and roughly sketched ethnic stereotypes (a Chinese laundryman mutilates the enemy with a hot iron) and a white-knuckle cab ride with Lloyd at the wheel and Babe Ruth playing himself as the passenger, in an impressive performance of comic bluster. It's all very slickly photographed and hurtles along with the tempo to justify the title. Still, *Speedy* is every bit as sweet as audiences would expect from Lloyd's 'glasses' character.

*Speedy* is also an enjoyable glimpse of a city in the midst of transition, even if the New York location shooting was generously supplemented by set work in Los Angeles, allowing Lloyd to leap from coast to coast in a single reverse shot.

**Disc:** *Speedy* is among the first titles to be released by the esteemed Criterion Collection in the UK. As such this is a Region B reprint of the existing Region A Criterion Blu-ray, with impressive extras including a booklet essay by critic Phillip Lopate, commentary by Film Forum's Bruce Goldstein and TCM's Scott McGee, one featurette on the locations and another on deleted scenes, a 40-minute documentary about Babe Ruth's appearances on film, home-movie footage narrated by Harold's granddaughter Suzanne Lloyd and 1919 two-reeler *Bumping into Broadway*, Lloyd's only other NYC-set film. The film is presented in an exemplary 4k restoration with a rousing score by Carl Davis.

## SPRING MEETING

Walter C. Mycroft; UK 1941; Network/Region 2; 1.33:1; Features: PDFs of original script and theatre programme, image gallery

### Reviewed by Neil Mitchell

Released in the US under the rather more expository title *Three Wise Brides*, Walter C. Mycroft's *Spring Meeting* is a genteel romantic comedy that proved a popular box-office draw on release. Based on the equally successful stage play by John Perry and Irish author Molly Keane (writing under her then pseudonym M.J. Farrell), this light-hearted tale of love conquering all – primarily familial expectations and responsibilities – played well to a domestic audience that was dealing with the altogether grimmer day-to-day realities of life during wartime.



Breaking the code: *Three Days of the Condor*

Facing financial destitution, Tiny Fox-Collier (Enid Stamp-Taylor) and her charming, easy-going son Tony (Michael Wilding) pitch up at the Irish country estate of Tiny's widowed but wealthy former beau Sir Richard Furze (Henry Edwards). Fully focused on arranging for Tony to marry Furze's aloof eldest daughter Joan (Sarah Churchill), Tiny finds her plans for financial salvation derailed by her son's infatuation with Baby (Nova Pilbeam), Sarah's ebullient younger sister. The unfolding narrative contains many thematic elements that would later be explored more successfully and memorably in Powell and Pressburger's *I Know Where I'm Going!* (1945) and David Lean's *Hobson's Choice* (1954).

The formidable and always entertaining Margaret Rutherford, reprising her turn as Aunt Bijou from *Spring Meeting's* initial stage run, delivers the film's standout performance. The core story may revolve around the burgeoning affections between Tony and Baby, but it's the sparky energy Rutherford brings to a relatively minor character that leaves the strongest impression in an amiable if unexceptional production.

**Disc:** A crisp new transfer.

## THREE DAYS OF THE CONDOR

Sydney Pollack; USA 1975; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 15; 118 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: video interview with Sheldon Hall, 'The Directors: Sydney Pollack', theatrical trailer, essay booklet

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

Sydney Pollack's work within varied genres shows fidelity to classic forms but, as he admitted to *Jump Cut* magazine, "I love to fool around with serious ideas."

This archetypal 70s paranoia thriller, pared down and smartened up from James Grady's potboiler novel and riven with post-Watergate suspicion, exemplifies his thoughtful middlebrow approach, its heavyweight concerns (CIA corruption, the coming oil crisis) animating the tightly crafted thriller plotting. The taut script by Lorenzo Semple Jr and frequent Pollack collaborator David Rayfiel still sells as a screenwriting how-to, 40 years on. Neo-Hitchcockian in its structure (similar to *The 39 Steps*, as Sheldon Hall's wide-ranging interview points out), the film also retains the 'maverick against the establishment' template that Pollack's films with Robert Redford often adopted, as in *Jeremiah Johnson* or *The Electric Horseman*.

Unflashy to look at (Hall is interesting on how Pollack's style bridges traditional and New Hollywood), the direction ratchets up the tension with tight close-ups and a growing sense of claustrophobia. Faye Dunaway's kidnapped love interest adds a wry charm, and Max von Sydow's pragmatic assassin even more (his "It will happen this way" prediction of the hero's probable end is a dextrous mix of politesse and cold logic).

Fascinating to see, in the age of data dumps and WikiLeaks, the film's foregrounding of technology, its story set off by the room-sized computer that analyses novels for CIA plots.

**Disc:** The Blu-ray does full justice to the chilly colour palette and Dave Grusin's jagged jazz score. Extras, such as Michael Brooke's thoughtful essay, are well chosen rather than piled high.



## LONG SHOT

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

A sharp, funny look at the lot of the independent filmmaker is enlivened by cameos from a who's who of industry figures

By Dylan Cave

Jean-Luc Godard's maxim that "all you need for a movie is a gun and girl" has inspired screenwriters and directors across the world, but any producers worth their salt know that hard cash and a good script helps too. This was particularly true during the late 1970s, when the British film industry had all but collapsed and independent filmmakers were reliant on a tiny network of production companies, distributors and investors for finance. Although British technical and special-effects expertise was blooming, and Hollywood was returning to the UK for major productions such as *Star Wars* (1977), *Superman* (1978) and the Bond franchise, smaller independent British companies were struggling. How, in 1977, did an aspiring new producer get a film made?

It's the question raised by writer/director/producer Maurice Hutton in his acutely funny yet almost forgotten *Long Shot*. Set during the 1977 Edinburgh Film Festival, it tells the tale of two filmmakers trying to bring their Aberdeen-set adventure movie *Gulf and Western* to the screen.

Charlie Gormley is a producer of documentaries and short films who's eager to break into features. When a distributor offers match-funding on condition the film has a name director, Charlie travels to Edinburgh with his screenwriter Neville Smith. Together they try to track down Sam Fuller, who is supposedly at the festival with Wim Wenders and *The American Friend*. Amid the buzz of the festival, they encounter different film industry professionals, each with an opinion on Charlie and Neville's script, ranging from the useful to the downright unhelpful: "Sam Fuller...?" asks one of the disengaged festival team "...is he press?"

Hutton was a co-founder of production company Mithras Films with Richard de la Mare and John Irvin. Set up in the early 1960s, Mithras produced a remarkable series of documentaries exploring life among different communities in British society, from miners (*Gala Day*, 1963) to politicians (*The Challenge*, 1965) and strippers (*Carousella*, 1965). *The Challenge* won best documentary at Venice, and this award-winning documentary instinct is an asset in *Long Shot*, blurring the film's thin line between fact and fiction. Charlie and Neville are playing versions of themselves: Smith had written Stephen Frears's debut *Gumshoe* (1971); Gormley would go on to direct *Heavenly Pursuits* in 1986.

In scenes that feel semi-improvised, Hutton observes the budding filmmakers as they mingle cheerily among the festival crowd or hold earnest production meetings in a cramped



Pitching for glory: Neville Smith, Anne Zelda and Charles Gormley in Maurice Hutton's *Long Shot*

*Stephen Frears is a haughty biscuit salesman, Alan Bennett a brilliantly ineffectual doctor who prescribes Meals on Wheels*

rented bedsit. He shot on 16mm using grainy soon-to-expire black-and-white stock, which gives the film a palpable sense of time and place.

The naturalistic performances and the immediacy of the shooting style keep the film fresh, as Charlie and Neville continue to pitch *Gulf and Western* to a veritable Who's Who of the late-70s UK film industry. After approaching Wenders to see if he'd be interested in being their second choice as director (he's cheekily listed as "another director" in the end credits), Charlie has frank and amusing meetings with John Boorman, Twentieth Century-Fox executive

Sanford Lieberman and powerful theatrical agent Dennis Selinger. Stephen Frears appears as a haughty biscuit salesman. Best of all is Alan Bennett as a brilliantly ineffectual doctor, whose prescription for Neville's writer's anxiety and sense of loneliness is Meals on Wheels. Each liaison tackles different parts of the filmmaking biz with gentle wit. When pitching the lead female role to Susannah York, Neville admits that the part is still a little underwritten. "And you thought of me," teases York straightaway, with only the slightest hint of irritation.

Between these amusing exchanges, however, it emerges that Hutton and scenarist Eoin McCann are building a sharp satire about the state of the British film industry. With each encounter, Charlie is forced into more and more compromise about his film. Talking to Lieberman, he blanches at the suggestion that he would need to be supervised by a Fox-approved executive producer. He explains that this happened to a colleague who "ended up going for the coffee". Lieberman responds sympathetically, asking whether Charlie would also go for coffee, if it meant the film got made. "It's a little heartbreaking," he adds.

Although filmed in 1977 and completed in 1978, *Long Shot* didn't see UK theatrical release until the summer of 1980. It was met with generally warm reviews but, apart from a one-off Channel 4 broadcast in 1985, has remained well under the radar. The BFI National Archive holds the 16mm original negatives and there's a fine 35mm print in the BFI's distribution library. It played at the 2010 Edinburgh Film Festival, where concern was raised about the merits of some of the British films from the 70s that are being rediscovered. Those concerns shouldn't apply to *Long Shot*, a fun, intelligent and quietly devastating indictment on the British film industry's darkest days. **S**

**i** *Long Shot* screens in the 'Projecting the Archive' slot at BFI Southbank on 6 June

### WHAT THE PAPERS SAID



**'If you can imagine a picaresque comedy being forged from the repeated lament for a native cinema, this is it – and its hard-knocks humour probably succeeds in carrying it beyond an in-joke'**

**Paul Taylor** 'Time Out', 1980

**'Most of *Long Shot* remains airily and delightfully funny as its meandering odyssey unfolds to the punctuation of Brechtian titles which point the moral that achieving success is easy if you abandon everything you wanted to achieve'**

**Tom Milne** 'Monthly Film Bulletin', July 1980



# SHOCKS TO THE SYSTEM

## INDEPENDENT STARDOM

### Freelance Women in the Hollywood Studio System

By Emily Carman; University of Texas Press: 236pp; hardback, \$75, ISBN 9781477307311; paperback, \$24.95; ISBN 9781477307816

#### Reviewed by Isabel Stevens

The opening scene of the Coen brothers' recent tour of 1950s Hollywood, *Hail, Caesar!* perfectly encapsulates the power that most actresses in the studio system are typically credited with: Josh Brolin, playing real-life studio fixer Eddie Mannix, storms into a starlet's house and slaps her for daring to take control of her own image by posing for an illicit photo shoot. The general conception is that actresses were trapped in the grip of their studio employers – and largely, this was true. Most actors – whether male or female – had little control over their own careers or personas. They were often forced to play roles they wouldn't have chosen themselves and if they rejected them, faced suspension without pay. Olivia de Havilland found this to her cost when she had six months added to her seven-year contract with Warner Brothers for time she had been on suspension, and it was only when she sued the studio over the matter in 1943 – and won – that things began to change. 'Jack the Warden' was her 'affectionate' name for Warner's domineering studio head.

But what about those women who worked the system and refused to sign restrictive, lengthy contracts – 'free agents' in 1930s studio parlance? Actresses such as Carole Lombard and Barbara Stanwyck picked freedom over the security of a long-term studio contract, but the power they had in Hollywood's golden age hasn't had much attention in the histories of the studio era. These women are the subject of Emily Carman's timely study. Timely, because last year after the leaked Sony emails revealed the extent of the gender pay gap in Hollywood, it emerged that actresses are still worried (as Olivia de Havilland was during her court battle) about appearing "difficult or spoiled", to quote Jennifer Lawrence, when negotiating fees for their work. They should all buy a copy of Carman's book.

Being a freelance actress in 1930s Hollywood – Carman's main focus – meant you had to be a fierce, savvy negotiator. "She has one of the best agents in the business but really does not need one," director Garson Kanin once said about Carole Lombard. Lombard was an actress who proved her aptitude for screwball zaniness in pictures such as Howard Hawks's *Twentieth Century* (1934) and Gregory La Cava's *My Man Godfrey* (1936). These were loans she engineered from Paramount – where she was under contract and restricted to glamourpuss roles – to Columbia and Universal



Free agent: Barbara Stanwyck refused to sign a long-term studio contract

respectively. After the Paramount contract expired, she wheeled and dealt (with Paramount, Warner Bros and SIP, David O. Selznick's independent company) and in 1937 became the highest paid star in Hollywood. Carman also challenges perceptions of how patriarchal 1930s Hollywood was. True, the rise of the major studios, with their rigid hierarchies, meant that many women, who had been employed in all manner of roles behind the camera in smaller studios in the silent era, were no longer working there. But as is demonstrated by articles such as Samuel Goldwyn's 'Women Rule Hollywood' in 1935, cinema audiences were dominated by women, and their tastes dictated the films produced.

One of the most fascinating discoveries in the book is the breakdown of actors' contracts, including details about salaries and shares of box-office profits (the latter was a sly way for

stars to reduce their tax bills if they thought the film would do well, as these profits, offered in exchange for a reduced salary at the outset, were taxed at a lower rate). The deal terms ranged from one-year contracts to agreements for a certain number of pictures with a studio. In some cases actresses stipulated specific designers, publicists, cinematographers, scriptwriters and even directors they wanted to work with (Carole Lombard picked Hitchcock for *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* in 1941, while Irene Dunne often specified that John Stahl should direct her). Occasionally actresses had male co-star approval. The best deals included "no-loan out" clauses but also the right to negotiate outside freelance contracts for themselves.

The downside to freelancing was that you had to be a hungry trouper, as proved by Miriam Hopkins's fading star power in the late 30s, which partly resulted from her unwillingness



to promote her films. Stanwyck was her opposite: very aware of the power of publicity, cannily leveraging her 'modern career girl' persona with female fans. Stanwyck enjoyed a long film career by Hollywood standards, and her keen appreciation from the moment she arrived in California that she would be able to get much better and more diverse roles if she wasn't tied to a studio paid off. Would she have been the pistol-toting heroine of Samuel Fuller's *Forty Guns* (1957) if she had signed the long-term contracts offered to her by studios?

Carman's scope is refreshingly wide: the creative agency and freelance empowerment enjoyed by Stanwyck and Lombard was only available to leading white actresses. Her studies of Anna May Wong and Lupe Vélez illuminate the racist discrimination prevalent in Hollywood: neither was a freelancer by choice and their short-term – often one-picture – contracts didn't have any of the benefits enjoyed by other successful actresses. Yet still they were successful. Mexican-American actress Vélez even had the same agent (Myron Selznick) as Lombard, but despite critical acclaim and popularity, couldn't get a long-term studio contract or escape stereotyped 'exotic' roles (she was even selected to play Russian and Chinese characters). Vélez remained a B-list star. Fellow Mexican-American actress Dolores del Río fared better, but as Carman notes, as the 30s progressed, the draconian Hays Code, with its ban on onscreen interracial relationships, meant there were fewer interesting roles for anyone who wasn't white. In 1939, after an Oscar-winning performance in *Gone with the Wind*, African-American actress Hattie McDaniel scored a contract with Warner Bros, but it meant she played the same domestic servant roles throughout the 40s. We can only wish she and other black supporting

*Stanwyck was very aware of the power of publicity, cannily leveraging her 'modern career girl' persona with female fans*

character actors, such as Louise Beavers, had been able to fully demonstrate their range.

More than 80 years on from the period Carman explores, Hollywood actresses – and in particular actresses of colour – are still being shoehorned into a narrow range of roles. But actresses from Queen Latifah to Jessica Chastain are increasingly taking matters into their own hands by setting up their own production companies. It's well-known – though perhaps not well-known enough – that they follow in the footsteps of Mary Pickford and Gloria Swanson, who did exactly the same thing in the 1920s. But they are also doing what Lombard did in 1938, when she was planning to produce with Ernst Lubitsch; and what Ida Lupino did in 1949 when she set up her company The Filmmakers and directed eight films. It's good to remember that these modern role models have feisty, pioneering forebears at all stages in Hollywood's history. 📖

## THE RHAPSODES

### How 1940s Critics Changed American Film Culture

David Bordwell, University of Chicago Press, 182pp, £14, ISBN 9780226352206

#### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Though the golden age of volumes of collected film reviews seems to be well and truly behind us in a day that favours the think piece, there have recently appeared several books on critical practice by writers no sensible person could possibly want to read on the topic. What a fresh breeze in a stagnant room, then, is David Bordwell's *The Rhapsodes*, an accounting of the go-for-broke cult film critics of the late 1930s and 40s who jazzed up the sonorous language of the contemporary scene, and who were in no small way accountable for the vogue for film crit anthologies in the 1960s.

Bordwell cites the posthumous 1958 publication of *Agee on Film: Reviews and Comments*, collecting James Agee's pieces for the *Nation* and *Time*, as a turning point for the recognition of criticism as art, though his story begins with the pugnacious reign of Otis Ferguson at the *New Republic* between 1934 and 1942, ending in Ferguson's enlistment and patriotic demise. (He would finally be anthologised in 1971.) Ferguson is one of the subjects of *The Rhapsodes*, as well as the three critics who, in Bordwell's view, heeded the call for an unsnobbish, youthful new film criticism put forth in Ferguson's 'The Case of the Critics': Agee, Manny Farber and Parker Tyler.

In the hands of these four men, "Every paragraph became a freewheeling adventure in slang, mixed metaphor, and yoyo syntax." Bordwell calls them the Rhapsodes "by analogy with the ancient reciters of verse who, inspired by the gods, became carried away". The usually circumspect Bordwell seems at times to have been carried away himself here, possessed by his subjects even to the point of internalising their vocabularies: a few pages after Bordwell refers to the "four-ring circus" of Tyler's movie chat, we find Tyler himself quoted on the "three-ring circus" of a typical movie scene. Language appropriate to the razzle-dazzle performing artist proliferates from the first, early mention of the quartet's "daredevil criticism" or Ferguson's "prose cabaret".

While each of the subjects of *The Rhapsodes* has come in for their appreciation in turn at one time or another, Bordwell's unique accomplishment is to situate them within the larger context of American arts journalism in the moment when they were writing their first – and, in the case of Agee and Ferguson – only film criticism. Farber, who also wrote about modern art, is compared not only to his contemporary Clement Greenberg, who Bordwell finds he surpasses without fail in noting detail, but to Erle Loran, whose 1943 *Cézanne's Compositions* is a model of rigour, and one of the texts which established the vogue for the concept of "negative space" that Farber expanded into film criticism. (*The Rhapsodes*

reproduces one of the diagrams of Loran's book, as well as how-does-it-work obsessive Ferguson's diagram of camera set-ups as observed on the set of William Wyler's *The Little Foxes* during a 1941 tenure in Hollywood.) A single excerpt from the "resolutely unexciting" prose of Ferguson's *New Republic* stablemate, drama critic Stark Young, suffices to establish the presiding tone of gentleman-critic "polite distance", the appellation that Bordwell's gang of whooping hooligan-critics were out to upset. As further background Bordwell describes the intelligentsia's then prevailing disdain for the popular arts, low- and middlebrow, a prejudice he finds his subjects able to overcome by "shrewd flanking strategies" – which is to say by ignoring them altogether, rolling up their sleeves and diving straight in to the work at hand. All of the film critics are shown to have picked up the close-reading strategies of English literary criticism, flourishing stateside as the New Criticism. As Andrew Sarris would later articulate it, they were the first generation of American film critics to talk about the trees rather than the forest, about films in particular rather than "mass culture" generally.

As one reasonably well-acquainted with all of Bordwell's *Rhapsodes*, much information here was new to me – the excerpts of Farber's art criticism, Ferguson's jazz writing, Agee's screenplays and Tyler's novelistic prose; as well as the reports of Ferguson's sartorial excess: "[Alfred] Kazin recalls him striding through Union Square in a black shirt, yellow tie, and bright green sport jacket." There are also Bordwell's typically lucid close reads of each writer's idiosyncratic style: Ferguson's jumping registers and prose bebop, Agee's melting, self-lacerating lyricism and "pawky humor", Tyler's surrealist "*sprezzatura*", and Farber's glorious accretions of language. (Bordwell modifies Farber's self-curated tough-guy image by dwelling the emphasis on feeling in his early work, while sideswiping at instances of macho posturing and routine 180-degree swivels of critical position.) This slim volume is worth an even dozen critic memoirs – and in recounting Ferguson's call to arms for a film criticism worthy of its subject, it sounds a *reveille* of its own. 📖



Upsetting the appellation: Manny Farber



## ELIZABETH TAYLOR

### A Private Life for Public Consumption

By Ellis Cashmore; Bloomsbury Academic; 432pp; hardback, £54, ISBN 9781628920703; paperback, £18.99, ISBN 9781628920697

#### Reviewed by Simon McCallum

To describe Elizabeth Taylor as ahead of her time in the celebrity stakes would hardly raise an eyebrow, even among those with the faintest interest in her extraordinary life and career. Quite how far ahead, though, is pored over and unpicked in painstaking detail in sociologist Ellis Cashmore's frustrating but occasionally compelling study. Readers hoping for a making-of jaunt through Taylor's colourful filmography will be sorely disappointed, as this book's rather off-putting introduction manages to indicate through a fog of quotes sourced from the myriad books and newspaper articles Cashmore defers to throughout – though, to his credit, he does venture to debunk them here and there.

A quick surface-scratch of a biography of mind-boggling dramatic range: a pushy stage mother propelled an apparently willing Taylor into the spotlight as a child; signing a contract with MGM at ten, her first leading role followed at 12, in *National Velvet* (1945). Interest in the beautiful and precocious young star grew apace and by her late teens she had transitioned to adult roles – and attention-grabbing adult behaviour. From here Cashmore charts the creation of the Taylor brand, via seven husbands and eight marriages, extramarital scandals and “erotic vagrancy”, two Academy Awards, multiple illnesses and near-death experiences, tenacious AIDS activism and a multi-million dollar fragrance range. Following her death in 2011, auctions of Taylor's legendary jewellery collection, paintings and *haute couture* made some £157 million, far outstripping estimates precisely because of the value attached to this iconic figure. Cashmore interrogates how that added value was created – and questions whether it's possible to separate the ‘real’ Taylor from the creation built on the projections of the studios, fans, press – and the lady herself.

The book comes into its own when revisiting sagas we thought we knew inside out. The tortuous production of *Cleopatra* (1963), and the unprecedented media mêlée as Planet Liz collided with Planet Dick, is deconstructed in forensic detail. The emergence of the paparazzi, photographers-gone-rogue who pursued the international stars flocking to Rome's Cinecittà Studios, became a global phenomenon thanks to Taylor's scandalous dalliance with Richard Burton, a logical progression from the muck-raking of *Confidential* magazine in the US. Cashmore does a good job of reminding us just how aggressive and invasive this experience must have been, while also hinting at Taylor's tacit complicity; nor does he shy away from casting her in an unflattering light: a case in point being third husband Eddie Fisher's brutal public emasculation (though some may conclude he deserved it).

A footnote to this Roman circus concerns the only other film in production at Fox at the time, everything else cancelled as *Cleopatra* threatened to bankrupt the studio. Back in Hollywood, Marilyn Monroe was making *Something's Got to Give*, furious at the publicity vacuum created by Taylor's European exploits,

not to mention her pay cheque: Monroe got \$100,000, Taylor ten times as much, the first actress to demand, and get, \$1 million for a role (she eventually earned nearer \$7 million). Monroe never finished the film, and died in August 1962, shortly after Taylor finished filming on *Cleopatra*. To the Warholian triumvirate of Jackie Kennedy Onassis, Marilyn and Liz, Cashmore later appends the sainted Diana, whose mauling at the hands of the press and tragic end is relived in inexplicable and reverential detail.

Cashmore goes big on the husbands and the on-off consorts – Taylor's unhappy time with Republican Senator John Warner gets considerable coverage, as does former used car salesman Henry Wynberg, apparently because he may have given Taylor the idea for a celebrity fragrance line. Yet her triumphant role in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966) merits just a few

*Cashmore questions whether one can separate the ‘real’ Taylor from the creation of the studios, fans, press – and the lady herself*

paragraphs, and some of the lesser-known films aren't even mentioned. One of Taylor's most ambitious and demanding roles, as disturbed spinster Lise in the Italian adaptation of Muriel Spark's *The Driver's Seat* (aka *Identikit*, 1974) – filmed in Rome as her separation from Burton was announced – is nowhere to be seen. Elsewhere the book, presented as a semi-chronological collection of essays, is clogged up by frequent, sloppy repetition and recurring references to contemporary stars which land, more often than not, with a clunk. James Dean “would not have looked out of place in *The Killers* or *The Foo Fighters*”; McCarthyite gossip maven Hedda Hopper's 1947 readership is likened to 40-50 million Twitter followers – “somewhere between Katy Perry and Taylor Swift”.

Cashmore is not writing from a film studies – nor a film history – perspective and, minor complaints on style and structure aside, his efforts in tackling the Taylor brand are prodigious. Ultimately a reader's enjoyment may be dictated by their interest in reappraising Taylor as a “curator of her own commodity”, over and above a little something that evades most of her celebrity successors: magic. ☹



The fame game: Elizabeth Taylor was the first actress to demand, and get, \$1 million for a role



## HER AGAIN

### Becoming Meryl Streep

By Michael Schulman, Faber & Faber, 304pp, £14.99, ISBN 9780571330980

#### Reviewed by Dan Callahan

Meryl Streep's position as a *grande dame* of acting has been hard-earned, but she's been the recipient of near incessant critical adulation almost from the start of her career four decades ago. For a long while she has been something of an anomaly in her business, presenting herself as a seemingly ordinary wife and mother of four who just happens to collect Oscar nominations in her spare time. A character actress who often disappears into her roles, particularly in her 1980s films, Streep herself is something of a mystery and maybe even something of a cypher, an artist who uses her imagination to create her often distant characterisations.

Michael Schulman's *Her Again: Becoming Meryl Streep* is a smart, heartfelt attempt to describe what might lie behind the curtain of Streep's invention. Schulman focuses on her childhood, adolescence and young adulthood, ending the book with her first Oscar win for *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979). Streep herself did not authorise or participate in this book, and so her own motives sometimes need to be guessed at, but Schulman leaves no stone unturned when it comes to contacting people she knew (and has likely fallen out of touch with) from what must feel to her like a remote past.

Like Katharine Hepburn, Streep had a secure family background to rely on. Born in New Jersey in 1949, she was a bossy, unpopular little girl with an intense aptitude for pretending. As a teenager, Streep got contact lenses, dyed her hair blonde and ingratiated herself with football players, but most of the girls in school didn't believe her 'popular cheerleader' characterisation. Schulman very touchingly describes her relationship with Mike Booth, a high-school boyfriend who later went to Vietnam and became a committed anti-war protester, and we get glimpses of just how strict and canny Streep's father was. When one of her football hunk boyfriends talked about marrying her, Streep's father saw him off by telling him that if he wanted to support Streep he could pay for the last two years of her college schooling.

Streep never thought she was pretty, but many other people did, including two college boyfriends who actually fought over her. At the Yale School of Drama, Streep was admired but also controversial, and she was looked on with disdain by some teachers rooted in the Method tradition, which encourages actors to use their own life as material. Schulman painstakingly describes the atmosphere at Yale in this time – he has spoken to many of Streep's classmates and teachers – and really gives a sense of just what a minefield Streep had to traverse in order to emerge as Dean Robert Brustein's ideal repertory actress, capable technically of any age, role or type.

Perhaps the most telling moment in this book comes in the description of probably the most important audition of Streep's life. Rosemarie Tichler of the Public Theater had arranged for her to audition for Joseph Papp, the king of New York theatre in the 1970s, and due to either traffic or a train stoppage – Schulman cares enough to get the smallest details of Streep's life as accurate as



A dangerous Method: Meryl Streep in *Kramer vs Kramer* (1979)

he can make them – Streep was an hour and a half late. Most actresses would have run in, apologised profusely and given a nerve-wracked audition. Not Streep. It was a hot day, and Tichler saw her walking over to them. She briefly explained why she was late, started acting right away, and left. And she got her first job in New York on stage.

*Streep is something of a mystery, a cypher, an artist who uses her imagination to create her often distant characterisations*



Streep in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981)

Schulman details Streep's confidence and grace under pressure, and reveals her devotion to her lover John Cazale, with whom she played on stage in *Measure for Measure*. When Cazale was diagnosed with lung cancer, Streep eventually put her career on hold for six months to nurse him and be with him, and this is the most touching – if at times uncomfortable – part of this book. Schulman does not shrink from showing the depth of Streep's suffering during this period, but then shows her gradually pulling herself out of it after Cazale's death and doing battle with Dustin Hoffman on the *Kramer vs. Kramer* set.

Hoffman slapped Streep in the face to get a reaction from her in the scene where her character is leaving him, and also taunted her with Cazale's name whenever he wanted to get her upset. Hoffman, a big movie star at that time, was a Hollywood version of the manipulative Method men Streep had dealt with at Yale, and she showed her enormous strength of character by never responding in kind to his provocations, brushing them off like lint from her jacket.

*Becoming Meryl Streep* is an important book because it succeeds in humanising an icon. There's something surprising and noteworthy on practically every page, and that speaks to Schulman's reportorial acumen and insightful love for his subject. This is the sort of book where every detail has been checked and every word carefully, sensitively chosen. It is a pleasure to read, and essential for anyone who wants to understand how this great and singular actress first came to make her mark. 5



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## SURFEITS TENSION

Mark Cousins's 'Guilty pleasures' (Dispatches, *S&S*, April) was a delight. I particularly appreciated his celebrations of watching alone (no "What did you think of that?" questions to companions, as the lights come up), as well as his reservations about the frenzied experience of film festivals. I am coming round to thinking that extended film festivals are a poor way of developing a deep appreciation of film, because you see too many films in too short a period: "It is now Thursday. What was that film I saw on Tuesday?"

Going to films should be like watching high-end television drama such as *Fargo* or *The Walking Dead*; you need at least a week between experiences, in order to savour their pleasures and prepare yourself for the next round.

**Geoff Lealand** University of Waikato, New Zealand

## CLOTH-HEADED

Your review of *Risen* (*S&S*, May) refers to the Turin Shroud as "now debunked". Far from it: what has been debunked is the 1988 carbon dating, which inadvertently tested samples from a repair patch added expertly but imperfectly in medieval times and different from the main cloth. More recent tests suggest that the shroud easily dates back to the first century. Stranger yet, the image's markings appear not on the surface of the threads but inside them. To our knowledge, this effect can be achieved only by an event on the lines of a nuclear explosion. Most intriguing.

**Patrick Fahy** London

## CRASH REEL

I found the "random-ish clips" Vadim Rizov bemoans in his review of *The Big Short* (*S&S*, February) illuminating. They show how impotent pop- and counter-culture was in the face of the forces driving the economic crash: hip-hop degenerating from 'the CNN of the street' into the soundtrack to the bling-bling-me-me era (Ludacris's 'Money Maker'); the naive move into esoteric hippyisms that constituted the counter-culture of the time (Polyphonic Spree). *The Big Short* is also the first film that attempts to explain the mechanics behind the global financial crash, though the 'Margot Robbie in a bathtub explains mortgages' bit had me laughing so hard that I couldn't follow her explanations.

**Dieter Wiene** Bremen

## OUT OF FOCUS

Graham Fuller's Deep Focus article ('The psychological western', *S&S*, May) is incorrect in stating that the mediocre *Westbound* belongs to the Ranown Cycle of westerns. In fact, it was produced by Warner Bros at Burbank with Randolph Scott reluctantly working under threat of studio litigation.

**David Meeker** By email

Note: this error was introduced into Graham Fuller's piece by the editors.

## LETTER OF THE MONTH PETER PANNED



I agreed with Nick Pinkerton's criticisms of *Eisenstein in Guanajuato* (Reviews, *S&S*, May). However, he omitted to take Peter Greenaway to task for one serious failing: the clips from the films that Eisenstein (played by Elmer Bäck in the film, above) made before leaving the Soviet Union were all reframed to fit the very wide widescreen.

Unfortunately, Greenaway is not the only director guilty of this. Over the last year or so I have observed similar depredations by serious filmmakers such as John Akomfrah, Margarethe von Trotta and Andrzej Wajda. It is a shame that filmmakers cannot treat the work of their predecessors with greater respect.

**Keith Withall** Leeds

## CLASS CONFLICT

Reading Violet Lucca's review of *Trumbo* (*S&S*, February), I couldn't help being provoked by her comment that lazy teachers "could – and probably will – show this to their class while doing a unit on the Red Scare". Perhaps there are such teachers but, as a profession, we work permanently under the sword of Damocles.

Perhaps Violet's point was a mere aside; perhaps – dare I say it? – it was a piece of lazy, inconsiderate journalism. But teachers are operating in an environment subject to extraordinary pressure, and the regard in which we're held by the public is a direct consequence of so many negative comments from right-wing politicians via the inherently right-wing media.

A little further on in the review, there's the tired aphorism that socialists are happy to sit high on their perch and talk about the rights of others from a safe financial position. Such a comment misses the point completely. Socialism isn't about champagne for the few but about everybody living well in a fairer and more balanced society.

**Gray Ross** By email

## Additions and corrections

**May** p. 70 *Arabian Nights Volume One The Restless One*, 15, 125m 15; p. 73 *Boulevard*, 15, 88m 15; p. 77 *The Divide*, 12A, 77m 30s; p. 78 *Eisenstein in Guanajuato*, 18, 105m 36s; p. 81 *God's Not Dead 2*, PG, 120m 24s; p. 66 *Miles Ahead*, USA 2016. ©Kind of Blue Films LLC. Sony Pictures Classics, BiFrost Pictures and Miles Davis Properties, LLC present in association with IM Global Films, Sobini Films and Yellow Saw Productions Limited a Crescendo Productions film. Produced by Yellowsaw Productions Limited in association with Naked City Films; p. 90 *The Passing*, 15, 88m 56s; p. 92 *Secret in Their Eyes*, 15, 111m 21s



# ORLANDO



Tilda Swinton's silent gaze to camera at the close of Sally Potter's transgressive film bears, and bears witness to, the pain of history

By Sophie Mayer

Virginia Woolf added, and then subtracted, one final line at the end of the manuscript of *Orlando* (1928), her centuries-spanning fictional biography of the artist as an eternally young androgyne: "The secret of life is..." In Sally Potter's 1992 film adaptation, it is exactly the secret of life that Orlando (Tilda Swinton) possesses as they gaze wordlessly at the camera, and at us. The 30-second shot finally cuts to black as the Angel (Jimmy Somerville), singing in the branches of the oak tree, ascends to a high note. A few minutes earlier, when the tune began, Orlando instructed, "Look. Look up there," as the Angel sang that he was "coming across the divide to you". The intertwined power of looking and of coming across divides is the secret that Orlando, and *Orlando*, divulges.

Potter's second feature film comes across many divides, not only between binary genders, as Orlando transforms from male to female halfway through, but also World War II, which moves Potter to include a vision of the pregnant Orlando running through bombed trenches, just prior to her arrival in our, rather than Woolf's, present. Pre-production bracketed the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the film—one of the first British-European co-productions—appeared to indicate a transformative era in both geo- and gender politics.

Shooting in 1992, partially in Saint Petersburg and Uzbekistan, *Orlando* had a multilingual, transnational crew. Its effervescent sophistication and mordant wit is underscored by Orlando's

frequent gazes to camera, ridiculing rigid notions of gender, class and nation. And yet the final, silent gaze bears, and bears witness to, the pain of history: even as the Angel voices an ecstatic shattering of boundaries, Orlando conveys to the viewer all they have seen of war, colonialism and separation.

Courageously declaring the hero of a canonical novel "neither a woman nor a man", the closing song 'Coming', written by Potter, explicitly contests Section 28 of the UK's Local Government Act 1988, which forbade the "promotion of homosexuality" in schools. Like Derek Jarman's adaptations of William Shakespeare (*The Tempest*, 1979), Christopher Marlowe (*Edward II*, 1991) and Wilfred Owen (*War Requiem*, 1989), Potter's film joyously placed queerness at the heart of Britishness. By the time the film was released, the dominant note in British politics was John Major's 'back to basics' campaign, predicated not least on a moral panic about single motherhood.


Unlike Woolf's Orlando, Potter's ends up a single mother, and a dispossessed one at that. Woolf's Orlando, a successful poet, marries sea captain Shelmerdine Bonthrop and they have a son, enabling her to circumvent sexist inheritance laws and retain possession of her Great House (wish-fulfilment for Woolf's lover Vita Sackville-West, who lost her own family home to an uncle). Potter's Orlando sends away Bonthrop, signs away her house, has a daughter, and may or may not sell her manuscript to a publisher who wants her to burnish the love story. Rather

*Pre-production bracketed the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the film seemed to indicate a transformative era in geo- and gender politics*

than a 'room of one's own' she has a motorbike with a sidecar, and her daughter has a video camera, its grainy footage intercut with Alexei Rodionov's shimmering 35mm photography.

Running through golden, dry grass, the daughter finally brings her lens close to Orlando's face, cuing a series of close-ups of her mother framed by the oak tree where the film began, 400 years or 90 minutes ago. The final close-up starts as the Angel sings, "We are joined, we are one with a human face", implying that we see the Angel in Orlando, but also all parts of Orlando's self, and even ourselves as viewers, carried in the untapped, extraordinary power of the non-binary gaze. For Laura Mulvey, in her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), the close-up disrupts Hollywood film's insistence on linear narrative and coherent spaces, infusing it with a "different mode of eroticism", an interruption smoothed over by classical editing; *Orlando* enhances and is enhanced by this "different mode", embracing the disruption.

Many critics have noted that the final close-up reconfigures that of Rouben Mamoulian's *Queen Cristina* (1933). Roland Barthes writes in 'The Face of Garbo' (1957), that Garbo's stillness marks the transition from classical cinema's mask to post-war film's individualistic face. Garbo's, he says, is marked by "a kind of voluntary and therefore human relation between the curve of the nostrils and the arch of the eyebrow".

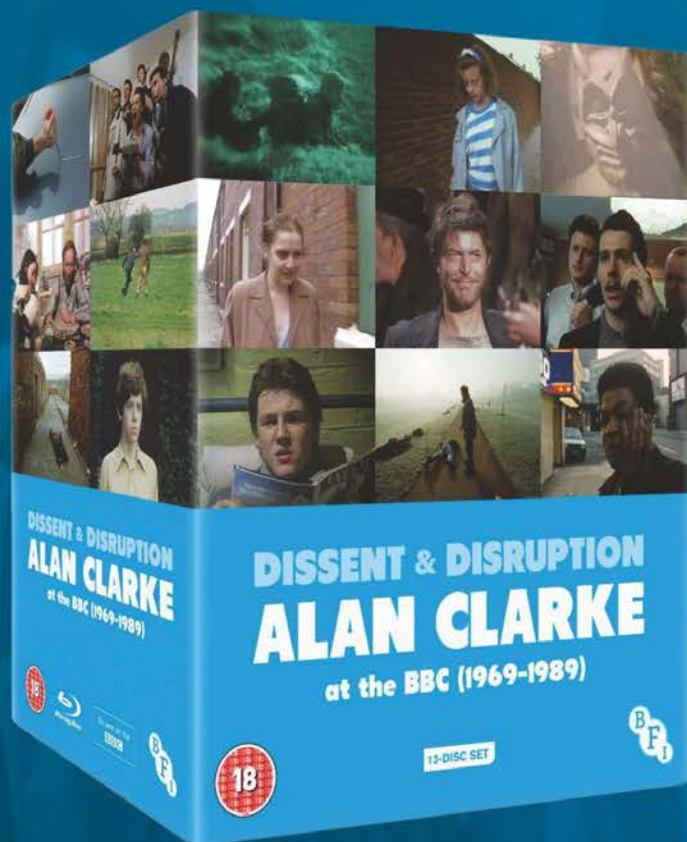
What for Mamoulian is hieratic, for Potter is dramatic: the "human relation" between the mobile bows of Swinton's eyebrows and lips, their curvature echoed by the fine lines that radiate laughter from the corner of her lips and beneath the eyes that turn to us one last time, carrying the riches and tragedies of a cosmopolitan, queer history across the divide. 



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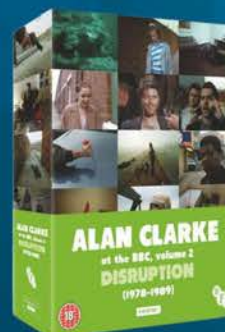
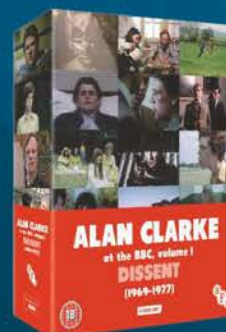
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